The Metaphorics of Erotic Pursuit and Sexual Violence in Classical Mythology and Its Transformations by Women Poets

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DECLARATION

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Abstract

The portrayal of heterosexual desire in classical myth is often ambivalent, without clear distinctions between seduction and sexual violence. The sexual exploits of male gods like Zeus, Apollo and Poseidon are frequently described, as Kate Nichols observes, with the term "seduction," though the unions commonly involve "sexual violence" (109). The underlying imagery on which these tales are built is the metaphor of the hunt, which casts the male as predator and the female as prey, and involves a relentless attempt to capture and possess the woman sexually. An example is the tale of Apollo's pursuit of Daphne, where the god is compared to "a wolf" or "a lion," the fleeing nymph to "a lamb" or "a deer" (Ovid 1.504-6). This portrayal of male desire as something that necessitates the overpowering of the female figure, often performed as an act of sexual violence, is revised by woman poets, who rewrite the tales of figures such as Daphne, Medusa and Leda in a manner that exposes this dynamic. In the word "revision" lies the concept of improving or rewriting, while the word mythopoeia is made up of the Greek words mythos (μῦθος), meaning "tale" or "story," and poéia, semantically related to the verb poéõ (ποέω), meaning "to make," which leads to the literal translation of "story-making," or, as Alicia Ostriker and Deirdre Byrne word it, "mythmaking" (4, 71). When women writers engage in the making of myth by altering and transforming the original tales in their poetry, particularly in the case of accounts where distinctions between seduction and sexual violence are ambivalent, the lack of clarity that exists in the primary sources is erased through the creation of a new language and new focal points to effect their retellings. In the poetic re-appropriations of Medusa unpacked in this thesis, for instance,

aspects such as rage, creative inspiration and sexuality are conveyed through the perspectives of female first-person speakers to grant the Gorgon a complexity and agency not present in the classical texts, whereas the revisions of Leda engage with the pertinent question of consent in all its capacities. Consequently, this thesis considers the perspectives of the female figures of classical myth through the poetic re-appropriations of H.D. ("Pursuit," "Leda"), Edna St. Vincent Millay ("Daphne"), Anne Sexton ("Where I live in this Honorable House of the Laurel Tree"), Sylvia Plath ("On the Difficulty of Conjuring Up a Dryad"), May Sarton ("The Muse as Medusa"), Carol Anne Duffy ("Medusa," "Leda"), Amy Clampitt ("Medusa"), Eleanor Brown ("Leda, No Swan") and Maxine Kumin ("Pantoum, with Swan").

Opsomming

Die verteenwoordiging van heteroseksuele begeerte in klassieke mitologie is dikwels teenstrydig, sonder ’n duidelike onderskeid tussen verleiding en seksuele geweld. Die seksuele eskapades van gode soos Zeus, Apollo en Poseidon word volgens Kate Nichols gereeld as “verleiding” beskryf, alhoewel daar dikwels “seksuele geweld” betrokke is (109). Die onderliggende beeldspraak waarop díe verhale steun is die metafoor van die jagtog, wat die man as jagter en die vrou as prooi uitbeeld, en behels ’n onverbiddelike poging om die vrou seksueel te oorheers. ’n Bekende voorbeeld is die verhaal waar Apollo op jag na Daphne is, wat die god aan “’n wolf” of “’n leeu” vergelyk en die nimf as “’n lam” of “’n wildsbok” voorstel (Ovidius 1.504-6). Die uitbeelding van manlike lus as iets wat die oorheersing van die vrou behels, dikwels as seksuele geweld beoefen, is deur vrouedigters hersien, wat die verhale van figure soos Daphne, Medusa en Leda herskryf om díe patroon te ontbloot. Aan die woord “hersiening” kan konnotasies soos verbetering en herskrywing gekoppel word, terwyl mitopoéia ontstaan uit die Griekse woorde “mitos” (μῦθος), wat storie beteken, en poéia, verwant aan die Griekse werkwoord poéõ (ποέω), wat as maak vertaal kan word. Die samestelling mitopoéia lei dus tot die letterlike vertaling van “storieskepping,” wat Alicia Ostriker en Deirdre Byrne as “mitologievorming” beskryf (4, 71). Waneer vrouens in die proses van mitologievorming betrokke is deur die oorspronklike verhale te herskep in hulle gedigte, veral in gevalle waar die onderskeid tussen verleiding en seksuele geweld nie duidelik is nie, raak hulle van die onduidelikheid in die oorspronklike verhale ontslae, en skep hulle ’n nuwe taal en nuwe onderwerpe om hulle herskrywings saam te stel. Byvoorbeeld, in die

poëtiese herskrywings van Medusa wat in die tesis bespreek word, word aspekte soos toorn, kreatiewe inspirasie en seksualiteit verwoord deur die perspektief van vroulike eerstepersoon-sprekers, wat aan haar ’n kompleksitiet toeskryf wat nie in die oorspronklike verhale voorkom nie. Verder word daar in die herskrywings van Leda aan die belangrike onderwerp van toestemming in die konteks van seksuele verhoudings aandag gegee. Vervolgens neem dìe tesis die perspektiewe van vroulike figure uit klassieke mitologie in ag deur die herskrywings van H.D. (“Pursuit,” “Leda”), Edna St. Vincent Millay (“Daphne”), Anne Sexton (“Where I live in this Honorable House of the Laurel Tree”), Sylvia Plath (“On the Difficulty of Conjuring Up a Dryad”), May Sarton (“The Muse as Medusa”), Carol Anne Duffy (“Medusa,” “Leda”), Amy Clampitt (“Medusa”), Eleanor Brown (“Leda, No Swan”) en Maxine Kumin (“Pantoum, with Swan”).

Contents

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CHAPTER 1

Introduction:

Theoretical Overview: Seduction, Sexual Violence, Metaphor and Feminist Mythopoeia

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Introduction

The representation of heterosexual desire in classical myth is often ambivalent, without clear distinction between seduction and sexual violence. Andrew Stewart, for instance, observes that Hesiod's *Theogony*, which lists the sexual encounters between Zeus and various goddesses, "barely distinguishes between marriage, seduction and rape," with the verb "loved" and vague formulations like "came to the bed [of]" and "joined in passion [with]" indicating the way that various heroes are conceived (in Reeder 76). Likewise, Kate Nichols refers to the ambivalence of the language used in the classical accounts, describing the way instances of "sexual violence" are euphemistically "coded" through use of the term "seduction" (109), whereas Leo Curran identifies the euphemism employed by commentators on Ovid[1] who avoid using the word "rape," also acknowledging the author's less than explicit "language" in describing the various occurrences of "rape, attempted rape or sexual extortion hardly distinguishable from rape" (214). A common theme that emerges from these classical texts is the metaphor of the

[1] References are to Ovid's *Metamorphoses* throughout, unless otherwise stated.

hunt, which represents the male as predator and the female as prey. In the account of Apollo and Daphne, for instance, the god is compared to "a wolf" or "a lion," the fleeing nymph to "a lamb" or "a deer" (Ovid 1.504-6). Through this imagery, male desire is portrayed as an active and overpowering force that manifests in the drive to pursue and possess the female object sexually. This representation of love, frequently aestheticised in classical myth, has been the metaphorical basis of heterosexual romance through time. María Lopez Maistre describes it as "the source domain of the hunt" (90), a figurative device that functions in what Hans Blumenberg refers to as an absolute metaphor in that it is so immersed in the discourse of heterosexual interactions that it goes undetected, and, for this reason, unquestioned (3). This language, which aids in subverting female subjectivity, is described by Louise du Toit as "the dominant symbolic order," language that normalises perceptions of masculinity as active and femininity as passive, which leads to a "social context" that "normalises rape"(66). Writing from a world where sexual violence is rife, woman poets who draw from classical myth set out to restructure this language to empower the female subject, a process described as revisionist mythopoeia. In the word "revision" lies the concept of improving or rewriting, while the word mythopoeia is made up of the Greek words mythos (μῦθος), meaning "tale" or "story," and poéia, semantically related to the verb poéõ (ποέω), meaning "to make," which leads to the literal translation of "story-making," or, as Alicia Ostriker and Deirdre Byrne word it, "mythmaking" (4, 71). When women writers engage in the making of myth, they transform the ambiguity that accompanies heterosexual interactions in original tales, creating a new language that empowers the women silenced in the classical tradition. In this

light, Sanja Bahun-Radunović and Julie Rajan theorise that "contemporary women writers and artists […] find in myth an adequate means to negotiate against various forms of violence, including those specifically against women," which aids them in "explor[ing] their own present-day social and artistic struggles" (5). This thesis thus aims to unpack the metaphor of the hunt as it appears in the tales of Daphne, Medusa and Leda, and consider the way in which it is revised in the poems of H.D. ("Pursuit," "Leda"), Edna St. Vincent Millay ("Daphne"), Anne Sexton ("Where I live in this Honorable House of the Laurel Tree"), Sylvia Plath ("On the Difficulty of Conjuring Up a Dryad"), May Sarton ("The Muse as Medusa"), Carol Anne Duffy ("Medusa," "Leda"), Amy Clampitt ("Medusa"), Eleanor Brown ("Leda, No Swan") and Maxine Kumin ("Pantoum, with Swan").[2]

To demonstrate the way that the revisioning of myth functions in the poetry unpacked in this thesis, the classical accounts that are drawn from will be explicated. Taking this background into account, detailed close reading will be applied to the poems to consider how they rework the original representations of the tales. The classical portrayal of Daphne's tale, for instance, represents the metaphor of erotic pursuit in its most basic form. Many lines are devoted to the seduction speech of Apollo, whereas the nymph is characterised merely by her visible actions: her fear and the fervour of her flight (1.451-67). Conversely, in the poetic re-appropriations of Millay ("Daphne") and Sexton ("Where I Live in this Honorable House of the Laurel Tree"), Daphne becomes the first-person

[2] An appendix of the poems discussed is included at the end of the thesis.

speaker, and her experience of Apollo's advances is foregrounded. Likewise, H. D.'s "Pursuit" and Plath's "On the Difficulty of Conjuring Up a Dryad" include female first-person speakers who respond to the metaphor of erotic pursuit in different ways. In the classical representations of Medusa, the metaphor of erotic pursuit is implied, as Neptune seduces her "in a soft meadow" (Hesiod line 278), or, according to Ovid, rapes her in Minerva's temple (4.793-98). The description of Perseus decapitating her is also reminiscent of a predator approaching its prey, as he stalks her while she sleeps (4.780-86). In the poetic retellings of the Gorgon, she is transformed from the silent figure repeatedly victimised to a complex female presence who wields her petrifying powers in different ways. In Sarton's "The Muse as Medusa," she epitomises female expression as the muse that empowers the female subject who looks on her. In Duffy's "Medusa," on the other hand, she is a vengeful female subject who directs her petrifying gaze at the man who violated her trust, a force of retribution that grows increasingly powerful. In Clampitt's "Medusa," however, the violation she is subjected to evokes sympathy, her petrifying gaze a defence mechanism that aims to enclose what is most vulnerable with a stony exterior. Finally, in the tale of Leda, there is no overt pursuit, but rather what is considered a seduction in classical terms, the god Zeus approaching her in the guise of a swan (Euripides 10.59). The most enigmatic of the tales, Leda's, is interpreted by the revisionist poets in different ways, with some reading the encounter as rape, and others as a consensual seduction. Brown, in her poem "Leda, No Swan," casts the maiden as a first-person speaker who recounts her rape in vivid detail, in so doing conveying her anger at society's dismissal of her suffering. Kumin's speaker, on the other hand,

identifies with Leda's tale. Immersed in her knowledge of classical myth, she is unable to rid herself of the memory of her rape. Finally, Duffy's speaker is a Leda who actively seeks out the sexual encounter with Zeus in the hope of fulfilling her fantasy of a lasting relationship. Through her stark description of the brevity of the encounter, she conveys his exploitation of her expectations in a manner her subservient classical counterpart never would.

To close each analytical chapter, I end with a brief discussion of a poem I have written on the relevant figure to add to the theoretical discourse of revisionist mythopoeia. In effect, it is a method of theorising through personal experience as a woman living in a society plagued by gender-based violence. Using classical myth as a lens through which I read the injustices women are subjected to, I portray Daphne, Medusa and Leda in a manner that adds to the discourse around violence against women.

Heterosexual Desire and the Hunt

In tales that document the exploits of male gods such as Jupiter, Neptune and Apollo, the process of erotic pursuit comes about through a common pattern. First, the victim is described as beautiful,[3] and this attribute results in desire being

[3] The description of the way that heterosexual desire functions through the pattern of erotic pursuit aims to problematise its elements. Particularly the concept of beauty, an attribute that invites male attention, and often male violence, is subsequently highlighted as an element of the classical aestheticisation of sexual violence. The female figures included in the many narratives of erotic pursuit are portrayed as feminine ideals whose main function within these narratives is to serve as objects of male desire. By exposing

aroused in the god. The approach is often achieved through transformation, the god embodying an animal or someone the woman knows to gain proximity. Otherwise, he approaches her directly, in which case a verbal exchange takes place where he attempts to convince her of the credentials that make him a worthy lover. If she flees, a pursuit ensues with the hope of performing the sex act by force. If the pursuit is successful and the female figure subjugated, the union will result in semi-divine offspring who benefit their societies with heroic acts and skills in warfare, though the victim often suffers transformation and tribulations at the hands of goddesses such as Juno and Minerva. On the other hand, if the victim escapes, this is also achieved through transformation, which, as observed by Nikki Bloch, still results in her pursuer asserting dominance over her, as is evident in Apollo appropriating the laurel tree that is the newly transformed Daphne as his symbol (6, 7). Ultimately, these tales commonly described as seductions foreground the perspectives of male pursuers, providing little record of the way in which the sexual encounters are experienced by the female parties. The elements of the pattern of erotic pursuit will thus be discussed in more detail.

The classical understanding of desire manifests in the goddess of love, Aphrodite, who orchestrates the pairing of sexual partners, and her son Eros, who carries out her instructions by shooting the identified parties with darts that evoke reactions of uncontrollable desire or overwhelming revulsion (Skinner 36). Through them,

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the pattern of erotic pursuit as it appears in the classical representations of Daphne, Medusa and Leda, and considering the way it is rewritten in the poetry of women, this thesis releases women from stereotypical representations that focus mainly on their physical appearance (the way men perceive them), instead highlighting their experiences as they *express* them.

the idea of erotic love is represented as something involuntary, a force strong enough to bend even the most powerful to its devices. This association is captured in Sappho's "Fragment 31," where the speaker, overcome with desire, speaks of "thin fire racing under skin" and "cold sweat" that "holds [her] shaking" till she so overcome that she feels close to "dea[th]" (line 9-10, 13, 15 in Carson 13). Likewise, the Bucolic poem "Idyll II" ascribed to Theocritus describes love as lethal and painful, likening Eros to "bees" in that he is "small" yet "deals" powerful "wounds" (Hughes Fowler 151). These associations evoked by erotic love are alluded to in various Greek poems, the implication being that Eros is a "violent and arbitrary force" that awakes a desire that takes complete possession of the one who experiences it (Skinner 37). As a result, Jupiter, the deity known for his various amorous exploits, considers himself a "victim" of "love," the implication being that he is not responsible for his actions under Eros's influence (Stewart in Reeder 75). Likewise, female figures like Salamacis, the nymph who "out of control in her frenzy" clung to Hermaphroditus until the gods granted her request to be joined to him by merging them into one androgynous being, behave as if possessed by an uncontrollable force in the throes of erotic desire (Ovid 4.351). Though the effect of desire is equally powerful in all parties exposed to its grasp, the way it manifests in male figures as opposed to female figures differs significantly. The *Oxford Dictionary of the Classical World* describes the Greek view of "sexual behaviour" as categorised into that of "active/passive as well as heterosexual/homosexual," with the "normative role for adult males" being "penetrative ('active')," whereas the "penetrated ('passive')" parties are often female (Roberts 701). Further, it states that "texts generally convey the experience

of penetrators" and, by extension, favour the male perspective (Roberts 701). Female figures subjected to desire tend to employ seduction in an attempt to gain the attentions of their love objects. Yet, while there are several tales that describe their powers employed in the act of seduction, which suggests a degree of agency, the prerogative of indulgence or refusal remains the privilege of the male figures for the obvious reason of their anatomy, and thereby men maintain control over their sexuality even when they are objectified. In the tale of Salamcis and Hermaphroditus, for instance, even though the nymph, in her determination to possess the object of her desire, manages to force herself onto the youth, he is still able to "[hold] out like a hero" and "refus[e] [her] the delights that she crav[es] for" (Ovid 4.355-69). Whereas this does not diminish the violence and suffering inflicted on the male figures in these accounts, it draws a clear distinction between the power attributed to male figures as opposed to female figures. This is implied even in the animal comparisons common in their descriptions of erotic conquest, which liken male victims such as Hermaphroditus to powerful creatures like the "eagle" while comparing female victims such as Daphne to docile creatures like the "lamb" and the "deer" (Ovid 1.505, 4.361). Accordingly, a considerable degree of male agency is apparent even in cases where male figures are objects of female desire, and on the occasion of male figures being affected by the force of Eros, the result is frequently that of a relentless attempt to possess the female object sexually. As a result, these instances are often described with hunting metaphors that cast the male as predator and the female as prey, as in the tale of Apollo and Daphne, where the comparison to a hound chasing a hare is used amongst others (Ovid 1.532-8). It is in the instance of male desire that the

dynamic of heterosexual attraction that culminates in erotic pursuit plays out most prominently. While the term seduction is sometimes used to describe these pursuits, the underlying goal of possession made possible by the potential for penetration distinguishes them from the seduction employed by the female figures in that the object in this case becomes a passive entity that can be overpowered, and, by extension, a creature whose will can be subdued (Reeder 300). In fact, in the tale of Leda's encounter with Zeus in swan form, commonly described as seduction, the god "bend[s]" the maiden "to his will" though he approaches her as creature not considered predatory (17 *To the Dioskuroi,* line 3-4).

As already apparent in the animal comparisons in classical tales of erotic pursuit, the hunt functions as a common metaphor for courtship in Greek thought (Reeder 300). Andrew Stewart states that "metaphors of pursuit and flight first appear in Sappho, and thereafter swiftly become commonplace, as do those of hunter and quarry" (in Reeder 76). Likewise, Anne Carson, known for her translations of Sappho's poetry and her extensive work as a classicist, argues that "[p]ursuit and flight are a *topos* [4] of Greek erotic poetry and iconography from the archaic period onward," also stating that "[t]he verbs *pheugein* (to flee) and *diōkein* (to pursue) are a fixed item in the technical erotic vocabulary of the poets" (Carson 19, 20). In a similar manner, Ellen Reeder discusses the ancient association of women with wild animals in literature and art, unpacking the metaphor of the horse that has to be "subjected to the harness" and tamed as an image for "young girls" who have not yet been "domesticated" through marriage (299). She also cites the

[4] Greek: *τοπος,* meaning "space."

example of Thetis, the nymph who was given in marriage to Peleus by Jupiter under instruction that force could be used if she was unwilling, as a "graphi[c] enact[ment]" of "th[is] theme of pursuit" and subjugation (Reeder 300). In Ovid, Thetis has "magical" skills that enable her to "change shape" which she implements to escape the sexual pursuer she had no part in assigning (11.240-265). Though she desperately transforms to plants and animals to elude him, he is finally able to capture and subdue her by tying her with a rope while she is sleeping (11.240-265). Another tale where this language of stalking and subduing is apparent is that of Perseus decapitating Medusa. The Gorgon is also sleeping as he approaches, and his harnessing of her petrifying powers as he takes her severed head is reminiscent of Peleus subduing the powerful Thetis (Ovid 4.780-5).

A Historical Overview of Classical Myth in English Literature

Although the metaphor of the hunt was explicated through various classical examples to analyse it in its full capacity, a detailed historical overview of the employment of classical myth in English poetry would be exhaustive, as poetic retellings of this nature have been prevalent as early as the Renaissance. For this reason, primarily poems that focus on the female figures that are the subject of this thesis, namely Daphne, Medusa and Leda, will be explicated here. Further, since the ensuing chapters trace historical developments in poetry from the modernist and contemporary eras, I refer to poems that predate these eras in this overview. The earlier poetic retellings do little to deviate from the classical representations, maintaining the expected characterisations of the figures. During

the Renaissance, the revival of classical conventions in literature began to emerge. John Lyly's poem "A Song of Daphne to the Lute" (1592), for instance, heralds the nymph's beauty, detailing classical ideals such as fair "hair" like "twisted [g]old" and pale skin, the "snowy [h]and" that delicately "melt[s]" when "touch[ed]" (line 1, 7). By the nineteenth century, the poetic representations of classical myth grew more diverse, with some poets, such as Sir Henry Newbolt with his poem "The Bright Medusa" (1807), combining classical subject matter with more modern elements, whereas others, such as Alfred Lord Tennyson, maintained the classical conventions with poems like "Demeter and Persephone" (1889). Newbolt's "The Bright Medusa" describes the Gorgon as an aid in battle, consistent with the Greek understanding of her apotrepic powers. However, the battle imagery with the "guns" and the Union "Jack" at "her forestay" conveys the setting of maritime combat in Victorian England (line 8, 11). Another poetry movement of the nineteenth century was Romanticism, known for its emulation of nature's grandeur and its effect on the individual, a sensation often described as the sublime (Appelbaum iii). This sensation is captured in Percy Bysshe Shelley's poem, "On the Medusa of Leonardo da Vinci in the Florentine Gallery," which describes the Gorgon in a manner that simultaneously evokes terror and awe (1819). The speaker states that "it is less the horror than the grace/ Which turns the gazer's spirit to stone," finding in the Medusa a complex combination of beauty and monstrosity, a "melodious hue of beauty thrown/ Athwart" (line 9-10, 14-15). Though the conventions of the nineteenth century are apparent in these characterisations of Medusa, however, it is in the work of Augusta Davies Webster that an early echo of the revisionist mythopoeia unpacked in this thesis

can be found. In her poem "Circe" (1870), she employs the sorceress as a female first-person speaker who expresses her sexual desire through the medium of an eroticised landscape in anticipation of an impending storm. Christine Sutphin describes female figures such as Circe as "remarkable personae for a woman poet to adopt" considering the conventions concerning female sexuality in the Victorian era (374). Nonetheless, she argues that it is particularly through mediating the controversial subject of female desire through classical female figures known to be subversive that Webster succeeds in foregrounding otherwise transgressive perspectives (Sutphin 373). This revisioning of classical myth is continued in the twentieth century with poems such as H.D.'s "Pursuit" and Muriel Stuart's "Leda" (1922). In Stuart's poem, the beautiful Leda is rendered an aged woman who reflects on her encounter with Zeus and the devastation of the Trojan War that stemmed from that union. As she remembers her winged lover, it is as if "gold" again "spring[s] in [her] hair" although she "sit[s] hid in [her] grey hair" (line 18-20). As the poem progresses, however, she alludes to Helen and Clytemnestra, describing herself as "the source […]/ Of all their madness" and declaring that she is "old with love and woe," with all that "once was love" grown "quiet" (line 50-1, 55, 64).

Arachne, the Pre-eminent Figure of Feminist Mythopoeia

Already in the context of classical myth, there is a process of feminist revisionist mythopoeia at work through Arachne, the weaving woman whose distinction lies "solely [in] her art" (Ovid 6.7-8). A skilled spinstress, she challenges the goddess

Minerva to a contest, unwavering in her insistence that she is her equal in "the arts of working with wool" (Ovid 6.25). In the process, she creates a tapestry that depicts "the rapes of the Olympians," thereby giving an account of the sexual violence mortal women are subjected to at the hands of gods such as Jupiter, Apollo and Neptune (Warner 95). Her textile foregrounds the plight of female figures in classical myth, as does the poems unpacked in this thesis. For this reason, Nancy Miller identifies her weaving as a "trop[e] of […] literary agency" that casts her a "self-positioned […] feminist" ("Arachnologies" 77), whereas A. S. Byatt describes her as "the pre-eminent figure of women's work" (in Warner 211).

The art of Arachne and its metaphorical connotations is a subject in its own right. Unlike the art form of song, often associated with epic poetry and frequently wielded in tales of contest, the inclusion of weaving in a similar context in Arachne's tale is significant since it was considered "the measure of a woman's skill" in the ancient world (Fantham 55). Ovid's decision to devote *ekphrases* – reminiscent of Homer's description of the shield of Achilles in their attention to narrative detail – to the tapestries of Minerva and Arachne suggests recognition on his part of women's artistic skill. The underlying function of *ekphrasis* – a narrative device used in classical literature to extensively describe objects, landscapes and works of art – is often to showcase the descriptive abilities of the narrating voice (and by extension that of the author) by transcribing a visual quality to writing (De Jongh 120). Yet, as Irene de Jongh observes, there are many facets to this device, one of which is the artist, "to whom the narrator usually refers in one way or the other" in a manner that highlights competence in

the craft being described and serves to liken the abilities of the artist with that of the author (120). For instance, the emphasis that the narrating voice places on the credentials of the artist is apparent in the description of Vulcan's handiwork on the shield of Achilles as "wrought […] with cunning skill" (Homer 18.481), as well as in that of the arms of Arachne and Minerva in the act of weaving as "experienced" (Ovid 6.59).

An aspect of Arachne's skill that is particularly noteworthy is its conventionality, with weaving described by Elaine Fantham as "the feminine art," which in its association with women and the household brings to mind a mode of expression that is chiefly feminine (53). Similarly, Karen Bassi postulates that the perception of weaving as "women's work" in the classical world which serves to confine them to the domestic sphere allows for a "communicative practice" that constitutes a "visual means" of expression by which they can "convey what they cannot […] speak in public" (63, 64). Unlike the direct nature of male interactions, which materialises in public debates and combat, women achieve a means of engaging with the world they inhabit that is not transgressive, and for this reason uncensored, a theme which is developed in the Greek and Roman epics (Bassi 64, 65). Making use of woman weavers, such as Arachne who expresses disdain for the gods in her tapestry, Ovid, in his *Metamorphoses*, builds on earlier examples such as Helen in the *Iliad* and Penelope in the *Odyssey* to display ways that the tapestries woven by women serve as communication devices. In Homer's portrayal of Helen for instance, she sits "in the hall […] weaving a great purple web" on which is depicted the "many battles of the horse-taming Trojans and the brazen-coated Acheaens" (3.125-7). Ellen O'Gorman

reads her weaving as an act of recording history, an active description of "battles" and the part that she played in their occurrence (in Zayko and Leonard 202). By inhabiting a domestic space and engaging in an activity that is "respectably feminine," she is able to take on a role akin to that of a war historian or oral poet without being judged (in Zayko and Leonard 202). O'Gorman furthermore notes that there is "an echo of Homeric epic and the process of poetic composition […] in [her] weaving," while Fantham refers to the weaving of tapestries as "the female counterpart to men's poetry" (in Zayko and Leonard 201; 55). In addition, Bassi takes into account that the Greek words for weaving, ὑφαίνω (huphainó), and sewing, or ῥάπτω (rhaptó), "are common Greek metaphors for poetic production […] beginning in the archaic period" (70). Similarly, Kristin Mapel Bloomberg turns to etymology to reflect on the metaphorical significance of the weaver Arachne to the concept of women's writing. She does this by including words such as the old English *spinan*, from which the verb "to spin" and the noun "spinster" are derived to draw comparison to the virgin goddesses who were spinners of fate (Mapel Bloomberg 2). Amongst others, she also includes the Latin *necto* (spider or wool spinner), which corresponds to the Greek word ρακ (rak) meaning "to stitch together," in turn etymologically related to the verb ῥάπτω (rhaptó) meaning "to sew" (Mapel Bloomberg 2). In her consideration of these terminologies, Mapel Bloomberg begins to re-define the figure of Arachne as a metaphor, rendering her artistic skill and her autonomy beyond that of her classical counterpart. Miller uses the term "arachnology" to describe "the embodiment in writing of a gendered subjectivity," the "figuration of woman's relation of production to the dominant culture, and […] a possible parable (or

critical modelling) of a feminist poetics" ("Arachnologies" 80). By these redefinitions, Arachne is rendered a creator, not only of tapestries and the advocacy of her own worth, but also a figurehead for female authors in her own tradition and in a world where modes of expression that surpass the ordinary can flourish.

Though Arachne, as a weaving woman in classical myth, serves as a working metaphor for the writing woman subject, what she sets out to depict in her tapestry is also a subject of importance. Some critics foreground the significance of her tapestry's subject matter, a portrayal of the "misdemeanours" that the gods inflict on mortal women, in inciting the ire of Minerva (Bloch 33). For instance, Vered Lev Kenaan describes it as a "creat[ion] of subversive and provocative tales" in its "depiction of the gods" that "emphasises their sensual, violent and immoral aspects," their nature as "womanizers who brutally violate virgins" (163), whereas Curran considers it a "catalogue of rapes" (219). Likewise, Bloch notes that the "twenty myths" included in the tapestry depict the "divine rapists" as "ignoble" and "often comic," delineating the irreverence of the choice of subject matter by contrasting it with the favourable portrayal of the gods as "powerful beacons of order and justice" in Minerva's tapestry (31, 32). Yet, regardless of the exact nature of Arachne's perceived transgression, it is her decision to depict numerous instances of sexual violence in her tapestry, tales that would have been part of the poetic tradition of her milieu, which makes her tale a significant point of departure for engaging with the revival of a female perspective in classical myth. It appears that her assertion of autonomy in her art stems from a sense of having been robbed of credit for her skill, and to convey

this, she inverts a prominent mythological trope associated with divine interactions with mortals – that of the sexual assaults inflicted by male gods on mortal women that produce many a hero – to communicate the sentiment that the gods' treatment of mortals is often unjust (Ovid 6.50-131). This directly opposes the underlying idea of Minerva's tapestry, which asserts divine dominance by communicating her view of the proper relationship between gods and mortals, one where mortals who challenge the gods are justly punished (Ovid.6.50-131). The restraint with which mortals express suffering inflicted on them by the gods is noteworthy for this reason. In the many tales where mortal women are raped by gods, the distress experienced by victims and their family members is apparent, as with Io's father Inachus who "fail[s] to appear" at the "gathering point of […] the local rivers" after her transformation for "grief at the loss of his […] daughter," raped by Jupiter (Ovid 578-84). However, they rarely implicate the gods as a party to their suffering. Despite the fact that the gods take from them whatever they desire, it appears that for the most part mortals adhere to the view of divine dominance delineated by Minerva by accepting that, "when gods [are] involved" in the abduction and rape of mortal women, "the en[d]" of producing semi-divine offspring, "justif[ies] the means," as argued by Mary Lefkowitz (60). Arachne's act of exposing the gods as exploitative in her tapestry is thus revolutionary in that she subverts the norm of placating the gods and accepting their superiority, choosing instead to criticise their controlling approach to mortals. In so doing, she is the sole mortal voice in classical myth that speaks out against the sexual exploitation of mortal women at the hands of the male gods who assert power to suit their every whim.

Medusa and the Writing Woman Subject

Apart from the conceptual effectiveness of the weaving woman as an image of the writing woman subject, the metaphorical re-definition of other mythological figures have also been implemented for the reclamation of female expression and the establishment of a female tradition. One example is Medusa, who, like Arachne, is transformed at the hands of Minerva, in this case after being raped by Poseidon in the temple of the goddess (Ovid 4.790-804). In her essay titled "The Laugh of the Medusa," the French feminist Hélène Cixous implements a speaker who "write[s] […] as a woman towards women" about "woman in her inevitable struggle against conventional man, and of a universal woman subject who must bring women to their senses and to their meaning in history" (Cixous 356). She encourages women to explore "that dark which people have been trying to make them accept as their attribute," thereby implying their obscurity as figures that enjoy little acknowledgement in history and the possibility for discovery and self-definition that stems from this lack of engagement (Cixous 356). She sets out to speak of "women's writing" and "*what it will do*," the phrase emphasised in italics to imply her strong assertion of female autonomy against an established male tradition which has "driven [women] away as violently [from their writing] as from their bodies" (Cixous 355). In so doing, she develops her central argument: the reclamation of the female voice and body through redefinition (Cixous 355). Like the reasoning she employs to redefine women at the beginning of the essay, she continues by asserting a new definition of the figure of Medusa,

the monstrous Gorgon whose gaze turns men to stone, stating that one needs only "look at [her] straight on to see her" and that "she is not deadly," but "beautiful" and "laughing" (Cixous 367). Through this redefinition, Medusa becomes a working metaphor for the transformative power of women's writing, a manifestation of its ability to unveil the obscured representations of the female gender in a male-centred tradition.

Femininity and Corporeality in the Discourse of Feminist Mythopoeia

A theoretical element strikingly prevalent in secondary literature concerning the process of artistic creation is that of conflating the female voice or women's writing with the female body. For instance, Cixous uses the example of "a woman speak[ing]" at a "public gathering" to illustrate that her communication is not merely verbal, insisting that she "throws her trembling body forward," to enhance what is being communicated by "her voice" (362). She continues that "the 'logic' of" the woman's "speech" is "support[ed]" by "her body" (362). The idea that female expression entails a "physica[l] materiali[sation]" of "thought […] signif[ied]" through the presence of the female "body" is also adopted by Lev Kenaan, who conceptualises the nature of women's writing through what he identifies as "the intimate connection between femininity, textuality and corporeality" (362; 162). He illustrates this through Calypso, the nymph who detained Odysseus on the island Ogygia by enchanting him with her singing and weaving, stating that her "song implies the presence of her voice" which "cannot be imagined without the actuality of her body" (Homer 7.250-60; Lev Kenaan

162). Building on the idea of weaving as a metaphor for the female text, he implements female figures from classical myth who are described in the act of creating tapestries to state that weaving "implies […] a distinctive relationship between author and text" in that "[t]he "woven" text is not merely a textual object created by the mind of its author" but "rather […] a text that must be understood within the horizon of its author's body" (Lev Kenaan 164). Further, he asserts that "weaving" serves as "an image of the embodied text: a kind of textuality in which meaning is riveted to its materiality, resonating with the corporal presence of its author" (164). However, while the theorizations of Lev Kenaan and Cixous set out to define the process of female expression in a manner that grants the writing woman subject agency and complexity, their use of corporeality to distinguish it from the masculine tradition does more to limit its credibility than establish it. Byrne unpacks the way that "[p]atriarchal writing […] has frequently constructed women's bodies in […] disempowering ways" by identifying the trope of "representing women as only bodies (without minds)," and, more significantly, "the patriarchal association between women and corporeality" (15). The stereotypes associating writing, an exercise of the mind, with the abilities of men, traditionally heralded for their rationality, are well known. Likewise, those that portray women as the weaker sex for the perceived fragility of their bodies and, by extension, their minds. The association of corporeality with the female text, though employed as a positive re-working of these stereotypes, is one that fails to deviate from the restrictions that accompany them. The idea that a woman "supports the 'logic' of" what she expresses with her "body" (Cixous 362) perpetuates the stereotypical association of "women" with their "bodies" even in

contexts where they are using their minds, a standard men are never subjected to when they express their ideas (Byrne 15). Another stereotypical association that the female body and, by extension, the conflation of the female authorial body with the female text inevitably conjures up is that of "seductive[ness]," which consistently with a classical understanding of the creative process brings to mind "the divine effect of the Muses" (Lev Kenaan 162), who as the goddesses presiding over the arts were assigned the "role" of "provoke[ing] desire in a[n] [often male] human artist to pursue artistic expression" (Byrne 5). The erotic undertones of this process of artistic inspiration and its reduction of the female figure to the role of inspiring male expression is echoed in literature where "women function[n] as men's muses," often as "objects of unfulfilled desire" (Byrne 5). The "spur for literary creation" (Byrne 5) that the subject matter of the unattainable woman represents is perpetuated in the work of Edgar Allan Poe, for instance, who in his essay titled "Philosophy of Composition," asserts that "the death of a beautiful woman is […] the most poetical topic" (5). The idea of the "beautiful woman" (Poe 5), then, along with the frequent examples from history of men "deriv[ing] inspiration from women," particularly their "bodies," is one that reveals the conflation of the feminine with corporeality to be a practice that favours a woman's appearance and utility over her subjectivity (Byrne 5). Accordingly, the conceptualisations of Cixous, who in her aim to reclaim the female voice and body in "The Laugh of the Medusa" foregrounds female sexuality alongside female expression and at times conflates these aspects, and Lev Kenaan, who illustrates what he considers to be "the intimate connection between femininity, textuality and corporeality" through figures like the seductive

Calypso, construct a metaphorical framework that is not altogether effective in foregrounding female agency in its own right (162).

Rape: A Classical Perspective

From a modern perspective, the undertones of sexual violence in classical myth can be easily identified through the language that describes instances of heterosexual desire, particularly the overwhelming lack of consent from the female figures. However, the way that this erotic imagery would have been understood by a classical audience has led scholars like Lefkowitz and Reeder to consider cultural context alongside the less than palatable aspects of the original texts. For this reason, they give preference to euphemistic descriptions of the encounters, obscuring the elements of sexual violence implied in the classical accounts. However, the prominent role that rape plays in the production of heroic offspring, and by extension, the founding of cities and religious rituals, is acknowledged by apologists for and critics of the sexually predatory Olympian gods alike. Nichols, for instance, observes that "[f[eminist classicists have long acknowledged the numerous, often foundational roles that rape plays in the Greek and Roman culture" (109). A brief glance at the heroes listed in any epic genealogy reveals instances of divine parentage, which frequently imply a male god's involvement in the rape of a mortal woman. Warner, like Nichols, observes the prevalence of sexual assault in classical myth by stating that "many episodes of rape and insemination lie at the foundation of cultures and nations in Greek and Roman thought" (11). The implication of the frequency of these accounts of rape

and the foundational roles they play on a symbolic level is an acceptance of their normality by their original authors and readers alike, an argument Reeder and Lefkowitz build on. Reeder, for instance, observes a cultural acceptance of language that implies force to describe sexual encounters in the classical world. She asserts that the symbolism of "abduction and subjugation" implemented in the marriage ritual of the "bridegroom's grasp of the bride's wrist," despite its violent undertones, was considered "a positive image" and "accepted by both male and female" parties (300). Lefkowitz also refers to this practice of "grasp[ing] […] [the] wrist" in her reading of the tale of Creusa and Apollo, using it to justify the god's capture of the unwilling virgin as a marriage ritual instead of a sexual assault (61). However, surprisingly for the idea of subjugation that goes along with the imagery, she asserts without clarification that the god "did not use force" in leading Creusa to his bed, despite the fact that the scene from Euripides's *Ion* that she draws from describes the maiden "cr[ying] out" to her mother as she is being led away (in Lefkowitz 61). Such an understanding of the abduction of the virgin, while correctly identifying the cultural allusions evoked by the act, misses the undertone of violence suggested by the relation between predator and prey that is a crucial element of the erotic pursuit metaphor that underpins this ritual. A further aspect of Lefkowitz's understanding of the heterosexual dynamics in classical myth that fails to recognise elements present in the literature she draws from is her insistence that male gods do not "rape mortal women," and, more startlingly for the existence of prominent examples like Alcmena, impregnated in her bedchamber by Zeus in the form of her husband, that they "do not abduct or seduce [women] from their father's or their husband's

homes" (56). Instead, she argues that the words "seduction" and "abduction" are more fitting to describe the sexual encounters between gods and mortals (54). While there is some validity to her acknowledgement of the persuasive powers of the Olympian gods, it is apparent even from her reasoning that, where gods are concerned, whether or not the sexual encounter is consensual is not a matter of importance, since the "end" of "bring[ing] glory to [a] family" through the production of heroic offspring "justif[ies] the means" (54, 60, 65). Her assertion that "the god[s] […] ask for the woman's consent and honour her right of refusal" is not accurate, particularly apparent in her reading of Ovid's account of Caenis (66, 67). In the *Metamorposes,* Caenis is the virgin raped by Poseidon, who agrees to grant her anything she desires in the aftermath. Her wish to be transformed into a man so that she will never again be subjected to the "[great] wrong" that he has inflicted on her makes the circumstances around the sexual union as well as her reaction to it apparent (Ovid 12.188-209). According to Lefkowitz, this decision results in a "fate […] less happy than it might have been" if she had conceded to maintaining her female form and bearing his child (66). This observation, which stems from the underlying idea of divine superiority and the potential for harm that a rejection of this fact may produce, is illuminated in Aeschelus's *Choephoroe*, where Pylades advises Orestes with the words "count all men your enemies rather than the gods" (in Lefkowitz 67). The implication of these examples is that the gods adhere to a different standard than that enforced on mortals, which gives them the right to take what they desire from their subordinates without question. Yet, the distinction between the different standard created for the Olympian gods by male authors and the power attributed to the

men of the classical world, who were considered to be adequate masters of the bodies and wills of the physically and intellectually inferior female gender, may not be as stable as classicists like Lefkowitz choose to believe (56).

A Theoretical Reflection on Rape

In the literature and customs of the classical world, the prevalence of the sexual subjugation of women is apparent. Though it may seem that the situation of women has improved since, with the rise of feminism sparking discussions around matters pertaining to sexual agency, such as consent, the frequency of gender-based violence has not declined. In her book, *Against Our Will: Men, Women and Rape* (1975), Susan Brownmiller states that sexual violence "has a history" that can be traced "through the tools of historical analysis," which may teach us "what we need to know about our current condition" (12). Nichols terms this prevalence of sexual violence "the culture of rape," stating that it permeates "mass culture" through "pornography, television" and "cinema," amongst others (109). Further, she asserts, like Brownmiller, that the cultural pervasiveness of sexual violence, while "related to a given social and historical context, […] is also something developed across time," a continuity she identifies as its "intergenerational aspect" (109). It is on the premise of continuity that the analytical focus of this thesis – the metaphor of the hunt in classical myth and its transformation in the poetry of women – can be applied to a twenty-first-century context, where the prevalence of sexual violence has not changed. Yet, as the term "rape culture" suggests, society is tainted by attitudes that encourage certain behaviours towards

women, violations that precede the eventual culmination of physical violence (Nichols 109). Drucilla Cornell describes this as "the wound of femininity," an erasure of personhood that removes women's "sex and sexual persona," stripping them of any agency (in Du Toit 66). Du Toit states that this "'wound of feminity' presents us with a way to understand the specific damage of rape to women in a patriarchal society as an injury that obtains *its particular perniciousness* from a wounded female subjectivity that is symbolically constructed as the antithesis of personhood" (66). According to her reasoning, then, sexual assault is not the first violation that a woman undergoes, but rather the final attack on the "personhood" that has been worn down by several lesser violations (Du Toit 66). A way in which this cycle of violation, the stripping away of female subjectivity, can be reversed, is by the creation of a new symbolic construction that empowers the female subject. In this light, Luce Irigaray theorises that "a relation of indirection" (*I Love to You* 109) between two parties does away with the "wound[ing]" of "subjectivity" theorised by Du Toit (66). She describes this indirection with the phrase "I love to you," the "to" serving to diffuse the relation of subject and object typical of the heterosexual interactions embodied by the metaphor of the hunt. "I love to you" means "I do not subjugate or consume you," and, most importantly, that "I respect you (as *irreducible*)," in other words, a relationship that respects the full subjectivity of each party involved (Irigaray *I Love to You* 109, my emphasis).

A Theoretical Approach to Metaphor in Myth

Steven Hoffman asserts that experience in and of itself does not lead to poetry, but "must be transformed into images," which in turn must give way to "rhythmic patterns" and finally translate "into dramatically convincing poetic incidents which become the joint possession of the poet and the reader" (Hoffman 696). The description of the "transformation" of experiences into "images" conveys the way in which figurative language functions as a mediating device for the expression of experiences (Hoffman 696). To this effect, Bahun-Radunović and Rajan refer to the "approach to myth taken by contemporary female authors" that appropriates from it accounts that can be transformed "to negotiate against various forms of violence […] including those specifically against women" (5). This is achieved through the use of particular figures such as Daphne, Medusa or Leda, who function as figurative devices through which the themes of subjugation and sexual violence can be conveyed and re-defined to favour the female perspective. Louise du Toit indicates the integral role that the figurative plays in the understanding of sexual violence, phrasing her conception of rape as "something that draws its meaning […] from a symbolic framework which crushes female subjectivity, in particular female sexual subjectivity and agency" (2). María Lopez Maistre expands on the idea of the figurative aspects of language that create "ideologies about gender" detrimental to female agency by setting out to unpack what she considers to be the "androcentric code" that "privilege[s] the male over the female and build[s] a gender hierarchy in which women are positioned below men" (92). Accordingly, she unpacks the "use of the source domain of the hunt" to consider "metaphorical linguistic expressions with

male hunters and female prey" (90, 92). In her analysis of the hunt motif, she identifies a number of primary metaphors that can be drawn from this source domain, one of which is the association of the male figure with "a sexual actor" conveyed through "animal[s]" such as the "wolf" or the "tomcat" (89, 91). In turn, the concept of a predator evokes further allusions in the form of sexually violent behaviours such as "pawing," "prowl[ing]" and "pounc[ing]" (91). Related to the implied power dynamic of the imagery that positions the male as predator and the female as prey, the idea of "the hunter" as a figure "assigned a dominant position over the beasts of nature" brings to mind "power relations" that "manifest asymmetry[ically]" in favour of the actor (Lopez Maistre 98). This source domain of the hunt, along with some of the primary metaphors that can be drawn from it (*man is hunter*, *woman is quarry*, or, more consistently with examples from classical myth, *man is predator*, *woman is prey*), apart from implying particular gender ideologies through its assigning of active and passive roles, graphically enacts the process of experience mediated through images relevant to the poetic accounts that this thesis sets out to elucidate (Lopez Maistre 98).

Lopez Maistre states that "[m]etaphors construct a worldview that shapes or reinforces […] conceptions or views of" what is understood to be "normal" (92). Blumenberg, in the introduction to his book *Paradigms for a Metaphorology* makes use of similar reasoning by citing Giambattista Vico's term "logic of fantasy," which, as he explains, refers to the semblance of clarity that a subject can conceive of through "the world of […] his" or her "conjectures and projections" (2). In effect, subjects, without having absolute clarity, construct a certain "logic" from what they "imagine" the world to be," the implication being

that they set out to describe what they cannot completely capture in language (Blumenberg 2). It is from this point of departure that Blumenburg introduces his own conception of metaphor, speaking hypothetically of a kind of metaphor which is a "'translatio[n],'" – the conversion of a perceived reality into the language that comes to represent it – "that resist[s] being converted back into authenticity and logicality," which he defines as an "absolute metapho[r]" (3). In fact, he states that "absolute metaphors 'answer' those supposedly naive, principally unanswerable questions whose relevance lies quite simply in the fact that they cannot be eliminated because we simply don't *ask* them, but find them *asked* in the foundation of existence [*Daseinsgrund*]" (Blumenberg in Adams 156). The idea of the hunt, then, an absolute metaphor that expresses the foundation of our understanding of heterosexual courtship, evokes the questions of pursuit and flight, concepts Carson describes as "fixed […] in the technical erotic vocabulary of [classical] poets" that are as established in the erotic language of civilisation since (Adams 156; Carson 20).

Conclusion: Thesis Overview

Having established the theoretical focus of this thesis along with the historical overview of classical representation in English literature, I close by briefly outlining the content of those following. In each of the consequent chapters, I begin by contextualising the mythological figure that is its focus through a theoretical framework followed by a discussion of her portrayal in the original myths. Taking aspects from this portrayal into account to identify the themes that

female authors take interest in developing and transforming in their revisionist reworking of the figure, I will close read the selected poems accordingly. I will conclude each chapter with a poem I have written about the relevant figure to add to the discourse around what she represents to the writing woman subject who sets out to identify her "own present-day social and artistic struggles" (Bahun-Radunović and Rajan 5). Taking this analytical frame into account, my second chapter traces the erotic pursuit motif in its most basic form by considering the tale of Daphne, the dryad who escaped the advances of the god Apollo by being transformed into a laurel tree. In H.D.'s "Pursuit," the violence inflicted on the female body during the process and culmination of erotic pursuit is conveyed through the image of a landscape bruised and battered by the chase, trampled underfoot by pursuer and fleeing prey. Conversely, Sexton's rendition takes a light-hearted tone, as the transformed Daphne, trapped in tree form and overcome with desire, laments her devotion to chastity. Finally, Millay's "Daphne" portrays an assertive nymph disdainful of Apollo's persistent advances, subverting Ovid's metaphor of hound chasing hare with the prey taking command and bidding her pursuer "to heel" (line 9). Building on the pursuit metaphor, my third chapter traces the tale of Medusa, stalked and raped by Neptune and transformed as punishment in the aftermath. It is as she is beheaded by Perseus, an act of "extreme violence," that the fountain of the Muses is born from her blood (Cavarero 16). Sarton develops this association with the arts in her poem "The Muse as Medusa," where the speaker conveys the dynamic power of "fluid," the opposite of petrification, which is the power of poetic expression Medusa passes on to her (line 16, 21, 23). Duffy's "Medusa," on the other hand, focuses on the

Gorgon's rage after her trust has been violated. Used and discarded by a husband who pursues younger women, her anger transforms her to the monster whose gaze can turn him to stone. Clampitt's "Medusa" also develops the theme of violations and transformation, the speaker unpacking the tale of Medusa's rape, the way she is blamed and vilified in Puritan revisions and her own reading of Gorgon as a figure sympathetic rather than monstrous, whose petrifying power is a defence mechanism instead of the deviant weapon it is often perceived to be. Finally, my fourth chapter unpacks the tale of Leda, the woman Zeus visited in the form of a swan. The account is noteworthy for its deviation from the metaphor of the hunt, with the vague classical descriptions of the union leading to different poetic interpretations. H.D.'s "Leda," for instance, with its description of gentle seduction through landscape imagery, differs significantly from the poems of W. B. Yeats and D.H. Lawrence, which describe the union as a violent rape. Duffy's "Leda," like H.D.'s, portrays the encounter as consensual, though it criticises the god's exploitation through the perspective of the Leda he abandons. The poetic accounts of Brown and Kumin, on the other hand, emphasise the narrative of rape, though unlike the male modernists, they foreground the perspective of Leda. Finally, building on the analytical perspectives foregrounded in each chapter, my concluding chapter provides engagement with a current social context where violence against women is normalised in more depth, delineating the relevance that the attitudes towards sexual assault in the classical texts incorporated in this study still hold to societal attitudes and popular culture.

CHAPTER 2

"The Difficulty of Conjuring Up a Dryad":

Poetic Re-Imaginings of the Pursuit and Transformation of Daphne

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Introduction

When the topic of erotic pursuit is addressed, the tale of Daphne, the nymph transformed to a laurel tree to escape the advances of the god Apollo, is an example that immediately comes to mind. From the seduction speech to the chase and, finally, the transformation, her tale maps out the pattern of erotic pursuit in its most basic form, a dynamic based on male domination and female subjugation graphically enacted through the metaphor of the hunt. This leads Curran to observe that "Ovid has produced a coherent and consistent vision of rape" of which accounts such as "the Daphne" contain almost all the elements (214). When these are taken into account, the themes that underpin the classical accounts themselves and the writings of later authors who draw from them can be identified. Reduced to its fundamental parts, the tale consists of aspects such as chastity, erotic pursuit, transformation and autonomy, and from these themes, women writers construct poems that reimagine the classical accounts. In this light, Byrne observes that "women poets use their art to re-vision" myths, those "fictional narratives that exert a shaping influence on society," through the act of decoding "some of [their] central constructs" (1, 2). Accordingly, the account of Daphne, beyond its formulaic existence in the oral and written traditions of the

classical world, becomes the source through which what Bahun-Radunović and Rajan identify as the "social and artistic struggles" of women writers can be conveyed (5). Transforming the expectations of passivity in heterosexual relations, chastity (often manifest in the resistance of male sexual advances), and the idea that sexual awakening culminates in physical and mental transition, each poet rewrites the tale of Daphne in a manner that foregrounds female expression. Taking these themes into account, this chapter attempts to extract the Daphne figure from the classical tradition that silences her by means of what Plath describes as "the difficulty of conjuring up a dryad," a phrase that conveys the revisioning of the metaphor of the hunt her tale is built on. Further, it conveys the way in which women writers are at odds with the language of erotic pursuit, expressing the "difficulty" they experience when they are made to inhabit this male construct. Removed from this androcentric tradition, which prioritises male desire and male eloquence, the representations of Daphne discussed in this chapter place her in a new tradition, one where female authors write her in a way that is their own. To consider these reconfigurations of the Daphne myth, I will discuss Plath's "On the Difficulty of Conjuring Up a Dryad" (1957), which engages with the way that the woman writer is unable to inhabit the male tradition of erotic pursuit, Sexton's "Where I Live in this Honorable House of the Laurel Tree" (1981), which revises the classical trope of the chaste Daphne in its representation of female desire, and Millay's "Daphne" (1922), which transforms the appropriative dynamic of the hunt by casting Daphne in the role of the tease that mocks her persistent pursuer's inability to resist her charms. I will also unpack H.D.'s "Pursuit" (1916), in which the bruising of the landscape serves as

the central image that represents the violence of sexual assault. Through the course of the poem, the speaker traces the path taken by the fleeing nymph until she is transformed to a figure that can no longer be traced, a process that frees her from being possessed by her pursuer in any capacity. Finally, I conclude the chapter with my own poem titled "Daphne," which emphasises the nymph's tangibility to express the extent to which the speaker identifies with her experiences. Building on the themes of female expression and sexuality developed in the other poems, and the imagery of bruising in H.D.'s "Pursuit," my speaker formulates the theme of touch to verbalise the pain of unwanted sexual contact and the healing that emanates from the touch of a "tree," the transformed Daphne, who understands the violation that comes with it (line 1).

An aspect of Daphne's tale which precedes the chase is Apollo's seduction speech, which Ovid develops in great detail to emphasise the god's persuasiveness. According to Curran, this involves elements of coercion, firstly apparent in the length of the speech that "list[s] his attributes at length in a parody of a hymn to himself" to "document[…] his power and exploit[…] it in order to intimidate the woman without actually resorting to threats" (221). Further, this "garrulousness" implies persistence, and aims to wear down the nymph's resistance to his advances (Curran 221). Considered on a metaphoric level, the speech also foregrounds male expression, particularly the epic form that aestheticises the metaphor of the hunt. Through the carefully constructed seduction speech which describes Apollo's credentials as a suitor, the poetic acumen of Ovid is demonstrated, as is the god's status as a deity that presides over the arts. Significantly, Enterline theorises concerning the chase that follows,

observing that Apollo is "the god of poetry" whose pursuit of Daphne "turns into a thinly veiled commentary on many aspects of poetic verse," particularly the "embod[iment]" of "a 'form' and 'figure' in need of arrangement" (31). The metaphor of the hunt thus becomes both the subject matter of Ovid's verse and a metapoetic commentary on the poet's pursuit of subject. Though Daphne's tale does not culminate in sexual assault as does many other tales of erotic pursuit, the violent undertones are implied through the comparisons that liken Apollo to predator and Daphne to prey. Enterline states that "Ovid uses 'os,' or mouth, as the one word in which to capture sexual violence and poetic speech at once," conveyed through the "simile for Apollo's chase" through which "the god of poetry's desire to possess Daphne turns into an image of a Dog's outstretched mouth" (31). In response to this male conceptualisation of the poetic process, feminist theorists revive female subjectivity by rejecting the narrative of violence against the female body. Consequently, Cixous asserts that women "must write about women and bring women to writing, from which they have been driven away as violently as from their bodies" (355). Reclaiming the female voice and body, her writing woman subject writes woman as "her self" and redefines male representations of classical female figures (Cixous 355).

The poetic re-appropriations unpacked in this chapter, as previously stated, focus on female expression, revising the metaphor of the hunt in different ways. Through their reinventions of Daphne's tale, they foreground her perspective, entirely omitted in Ovid's portrayal of her which includes only her reactions as perceived by Apollo. Since this chapter is the first analytical chapter and introduces the erotic pursuit motif in its most basic form, it consists mainly of

detailed close reading, through which this revisioning of the myth is demonstrated.

The Classical Representation of Daphne

A Greek version of the myth that precedes Ovid's is recounted in Pausanias's *Description of Greece* and includes many of the significant elements outlined in *Metamorphoses*. The geographer recalls a tale set in the vicinity of the Ladon which recounts how the nymph captured the attentions of Leucippus, son of "Oenomaus [the] prince of Pisa" (8.20.2). He "despair[s] of winning her to be his wife by an open courtship […] as she avoid[s] all the male sex," and, as a result, disguises himself as a woman so that he can "share in her hunting" (Pausanias 8.20.3). From her denouncement of "the male sex" and her participation in hunting, it can be deduced that Daphne is a devotee of Artemis, the virgin goddess who presides over hunting and wild animals, the implication being that she prefers to maintain the independence possible in imitating the chaste lifestyle of the goddess, by which she will avoid subjection to a husband through marriage (Stewart in Reeder 79; Reeder 300). Her avoidance of suitors to preserve her virginity implies the metaphoric association of the woman with an "untamed animal" that can "be domesticated," often attributed "to marriageable maidens" in classical thought, which makes her particularly desirable (Reeder 300). By gaining proximity to the nymph through disguise, Leucippus imitates the behaviour of male gods like Apollo in the act of seduction, gaining the trust of his love object by taking on a form that would attract rather than startle her and

waiting for an opportunity to make advances in the manner a camouflaged predator would stalk its unsuspecting prey (Lefkowitz 61). Consistent with this imagery of the hunt, the conclusion of the tale – an appendage by "[t]he poets who sing of Apollo's love for Daphne" – recounts how the god grew "jealous of Leucippus because of his success in" capturing the nymph's attentions, which leads him to ensure that his rival's deception is exposed (Pausanias 8.20.4). When Daphne and her companions decide to "swim in the [river] Ladon," and "stri[p]" him naked, they discover that "he [is] no maid" and "kil[l] him with their javelins and daggers," inverting the predator-prey dynamic that his deceptive advances bring to mind by rendering him the animal that is hunted, a threatening presence that is identified and defeated (Pausanias 8.20.4; Reeder 300).[5]

The god Apollo, as the driving force behind the demise of Leucippus, subjects Daphne to further advances. However, unlike his cautious mortal rival, he approaches her undisguised, relentlessly pursuing her when she flees (Pausanias 8.20.4; Ovid 1.451-566). This overt enactment of the hunt, described in Ovid with similes that liken Apollo to a predator and Daphne to prey, elucidates the metaphorical associations of the pattern of erotic pursuit prevalent in the classical accounts euphemistically described as the "loves" of the male Olympian gods (Curran 215). Consistent with this pattern, Daphne, described as Apollo's "first

[5] Whereas this reversion of the predator-prey dynamic appears to portray an instance of female autonomy, the source of Leucippus's demise is the jealousy of a male god, not female power. The inclusion of this detail appears to be cautionary, a reminder that mortals who act as if they are equal to the gods will be punished for their hubris rather than a critique of the erotic pursuit motif. While Daphne is able to eliminate one suitor because Apollo willed it, her beauty and chastity doom her to be pursued again, as is demonstrated in Ovid's account that picks up where Pausinias's left off.

love," becomes the object of the god's "desire" by the devices of Eros (Ovid 1.451-7). The envoy of Aphrodite shoots him with an "arrow" of love to prove the power he wields over the devices of gods and mortals after Apollo belittles him for his youth (1.451-7, 473). As is to be expected in the context of the pattern, the instance when desire is kindled occurs when Apollo catches sight of Daphne, whose "beauty and personal charm" serve as a "powerful" obstacle to her desire to stay a virgin (Ovid 1.475-6, 485-9, 490). It is implied that Daphne's chastity, a result of emulating the "virgin goddess Diana" (Artemis), increases her beauty, while the association with hunting and wild animals, and, more specifically, with the "untamed animal" that symbolises the woman not yet married, makes her all the more desirable (Ovid 1.474-80, 485-9). Likewise, in the course of the pursuit, her terror and her fleeing, further indications of her modesty, result in the god chasing her even more relentlessly (Ovid 1.530-4). The increasing intensity of the pursuit is suggested by the extended metaphor likening Daphne to a "hare" and Apollo to a "hound" that is close to catching her, he a hungry "predator […] about to close in with his jaws," she the terrified "prey" who feels "the tip of his muzzle" on "the back of her heels" (Ovid 1.533-9). When she realises that escape is impossible, she cries out to her father, begging him to "mar the beauty that made her admired too well by changing [her] form," which results in her "nimbl[e]" limbs being overcome by a "heavy numbness" as she transforms into a laurel tree (Ovid 1.544-65). However, while this saves her from sexual assault, the implication of her transformation is a loss of autonomy already implied by her loss of mobility, and is made more apparent in Apollo's insistence on owning her in tree form, even though she "cannot be his in wedlock" (Ovid 1.556-7). Like her

counterpart Syrinx, another devotee of the goddess Diana for whom a male god's seduction speech culminates in relentless pursuit and eventual transformation, "[m]etamorphosis" results in a "silenc[ing]" that renders her subject to her pursuer's projections (Nichols 110). Unable to speak in response to the new position Apollo assigns to her post transformation, she "seem[s] to nod in approval," a reaction that appears to be what he desires and imagines her giving rather than an accurate portrayal of her response (Ovid 1.566; Bloch 6-7). Similarly, Syrinx as the reeds that Pan crafts into the pipes that bear his name becomes a device that has no voice apart from the music he makes through it (Ovid 1.688-712; Bloch 7). Even though the nymphs are able to maintain a degree of autonomy by eluding sexual assault, the implication of their metamorphoses is simply a different manner of "taming," as Reeder would describe it (300), because their "transformed bodies" are "posses[sed] by" their would-be "rapists" (Bloch 7). This circumstance is unsettlingly illustrated by Apollo "press[ing] his lips to the wood" that is the body of the transformed Daphne, who, unable to run, is left to the futile protest of "[shrinking] from his kisses" (Ovid 1.554-6).

Poetic Re-appropriations of the Daphne Myth

In their poetic re-appropriations of classical myth, women writers draw from themes such as chastity, erotic pursuit, transformation and autonomy, altering them to favour the female perspective. Millay, for instance, writes from the context of the modernist, bohemian literary scene that characterised New York in the 1920s, where the "cultural paradigm of the New Woman" and the "assertive

female sexuality" that accompanied ideals of "free love" enjoyed prominence (Miller "Making Love Modern" 17). Framed by this milieu, her poetry is generally associated with "the sexual and social liberation of the modern woman," a characteristic apparent in her construction of female speakers who entice their addressees in poems such as "Bluebeard" and "Daphne" (Zellinger 240, 256-7). This use of assertive first-person speakers indicates her conscious poetic engagement with and revision of the conceptions of pursuit and possession that often characterise literary representations of female sexuality. H. D., while also a modernist writer, employs classical myth in a considerably different manner. Categorised alongside writers like Ezra Pound, T.S. Eliot, Marianne Moore and Edith Wyatt, she is known for her emulation of the styles of Euripides and Sappho and her involvement with imagism (Mackay 51; Collecott 95). It is particularly her employment of the latter that shapes the way that her poetry revises the classical myths it draws from. The imagist principles, as identified by F.S. Flint, include a "[d]irect treatment of the 'thing'" or central image, a conscious choice of words so as not to include any that waver from "the presentation" of the image, and a rhythmic pattern "compose[d] in sequence of the musical phrase" (in Mackay 55). This focus on a central image manifests in a specific use of the figurative, the imagist poem employing either an extended metaphor woven throughout or a series of allusions that adhere to the central theme. In short, the result is a complex engagement with a single narrative thread or "image" that runs throughout the poem (Mackay 55). When this thread is drawn from existing tales such as classical myths, it can plausibly result in a re-examining or altering of elements of the original tale. H. D.'s poem "Pursuit," for instance, is built on the

central image of the landscape as a wounded body, an entity trampled underfoot by predator and prey during the course of an erotic pursuit, which foregrounds the effect of sexual violence.

The poetry that comes after the modernist era employs classical myth in various ways. For instance, the literary movement known as confessional poetry that surfaced in the 1950s, which includes authors like Robert Lowell, Plath, W.D. Snodgrass, Sexton and John Allyn Berryman, was characterised by unprecedented candour, an "employ[ment] [of] the first-person voice" to deal with "transgressive autobiographical subjects [such as] mental illness, familial trauma, [and] gender and sexuality" (Rosenbaum 1). When these poems draw from classical myth, the figures they portray are inflected with aspects of the personal lives of the poets or subject matter that, for its intimate nature, gives the impression of being autobiographical. Plath, for instance, engages with her own struggles as a woman poet in a male-centred literary tradition through a first person speaker trying to capture an elusive nymph in writing in "On the Difficulty of Conjuring Up a Dryad" (1957). In her poem "Where I Live in this Honorable House of the Laurel Tree" (1960), on the other hand, Sexton, much like Eavan Boland with "Daphne with her Thighs in Bark" (2008), employs the nymph as a poetic persona to express a highly personal inner monologue describing her sexual desire, and, by extension, her rejection of the expectations of domesticity and chastity placed on women. The later poems, while also sometimes employing the personal, focus more pertinently on a self-reflexive engagement with the source material it draws from. In Faye George's "Daphne" (1991), for instance, the nymph grapples with a "self-doubt" that terrifies her as much as "the god's raw pursuit" (line 4).

Ultimately, though her transformation seems to bring about self-actualisation as Daphne stands "on her own ground" in tree form, this notion is problematised by "the blood" that "drains from her limbs," which implies that she is stripped of her vitality, and the fact that she is still Apollo's possession, "his changed woman" (line 8, 16, 18).

Conjuring Up the Dryad: Plath's Measured Mythopoeia

In Plath's poetic re-appropriation of the Daphne myth titled "On the Difficulty of Conjuring Up a Dryad," an emphasis is placed on the concepts of authorship and representation. A metatextual focus on the writing process is maintained throughout the five eight-line stanzas, conveyed through a first-person speaker unable to compose the subject matter of a nymph as she scours the natural landscape in search of the image much like the speaker in H.D.'s "Pursuit." However, Plath's employment of the classical erotic pursuit motif differs significantly in that it is subverted by the female first-person speaker being placed in the role of pursuer instead of Apollo, a role she inhabits by attempting to capture the dryad in writing while the subject persistently eludes her pen. A parallel can be drawn here with Cixous' writing woman subject who does not fit into the mould of "male writing" that obscures and limits the "representation of women," a circumstance "often hidden or adorned with the mystifying charms of fiction" (360). The subject matter of "nymphs" is typical of male fantasy: beautiful figures whose allure is increased by their unattainability (line 30). For this reason, Plath's speaker, who may be considered autobiographical for her

devotion to form and "craftsmanship," expresses the difficulty of the writing process for the woman who attempts to cater to a male dominated literary tradition (Markey 25).

The title "On the Difficulty of Conjuring Up a Dryad," which introduces the controlled tone that characterises the speaker's voice throughout, conveys the central subject of the poem in a concise phrase. This conciseness, consistent with the structured stanzas, highlights the meticulous approach she applies to writing, and implies her limitation to what is quantifiable. The ambiguous expression "conjuring up" refers, in one sense, to the process of conceptualising subject matter. Further, it implies the fantastical nature of the subject that she attempts to portray in her writing, this being "a dryad" (line 11). In effect, the title phrase in its entirety introduces the underlying crisis of the poem, which is the speaker's inability to conceptualise a subject that could be considered a male fantasy.

Already in the first stanza, the speaker's relentless pursuit of her subject is introduced through the word "[r]avening," which gives the idea of a hunter "greedily searching for prey" (line 1; www.merriam-webster.com, 2018). The setting of this hunt is placed in the realm of language through the description of a collection of ordinary objects such as "blunt pencils," a "rose-sprigged coffee cup," "postage stamps" and the "clamor" of "stacked books," which suggests that the speaker is sitting at a desk trying to write (line 1-3). The idea of "clamor" conveyed by the assortment of objects in the first lines is accentuated by the sounds described in the fourth line, these being the "[n]eighbourhood cockcrow" and the more general "all nature's prodigal backtalk" (line 3, 4). If it is taken into

account that a synonym for the word "prodigal" is uncontrolled, the speaker's description of sound conveys the idea that her physical surroundings, both indoors and outdoors, are in disarray. In response to this circumstance, the second half of the stanza expresses her attempt to impose control on the disorder that permeates her environment as she tries to describe it in writing. The image conjured up by the "vaunting mind" that "snubs impromptu spiels of wind" is that of a thought process that banishes whatever is spontaneous and natural (line 5-6). This dynamic is furthered by the speaker's mind that "wrestles to impose/ Its own order on what is," which implies a stubborn resolve to manipulate subject matter to suit her desired perceptions despite the reality that she struggles to rid herself of throughout the rest of the account (line 7-8).

The second stanza continues to portray the mind of the speaker in the process of writing, emphasising the haughtiness implied previously by the word "vaunting" with descriptions like "importunate" and "arrogant" (line 5, 9, 10). The nature of this arrogance is expressed in the phrase "[w]ith my fantasy alone" with which her "head […] brags," an assertion that echoes her mind's resolve to "impose its own order on what is" in line eight (line 9). Apart from this continuity, the portrayal of setting in this stanza is also reminiscent of that conveyed through the "bric-à-brac" of desktop items previously as the speaker once again lists an assortment, this time of animals and landmarks that bring to mind the countryside. The pastoral nature of this setting, already suggested by the "cockcrow" mentioned in the fourth line, is emphasised by descriptions such as "rook-tongued," "sheep-greens" and "finned falls" as well as the collective "trout," "cock" and "ram" (line 11, 13). The ambiguous formulation of "rook-tongued

spaces," which could refer to the physical, bucolic location, also brings to mind aspects of the writing process, with the harsh sound suggested by "rook-tongued" conveying the brazenness of her mind that sets out to alter an established order, and "spaces" the empty sections on the page where she seizes the opportunity to put her perceptions to writing (line 10). As she describes the landscape, she expresses her intention to "compose a crisis," a focal point that only becomes apparent in the next stanza (line 11). The fictional nature of her subject, foreshadowed by the word "fantasy," manifests in her intent to disrupt the natural order of her surroundings, the collective livestock that are "calm" and "[s]elf-sufficient," as she surveys their security with a "jealous stare" (line 9, 12-16).

Building on the mental devotion to "imposing [her] own order" on what exists in her physical surroundings conveyed in the first two stanzas, the speaker makes the nature of this manipulation more apparent in the third by introducing the subject that her "[r]avening" ultimately attempts to capture in writing (line 1, 8). Despite her efforts to control what she perceives, she concedes that "no hocus-pocus of green angels" will cover her "threadbare eye" with "dazzle," the implication being that she is unable to impose "[h]er fantasy" despite her efforts (line 17, 18). Upon closer consideration, the expression "damasks with dazzle" which conveys the idea of enhancing with a garment in combination with "threadbare eye" which implies a state of being stripped of any embellishment serves as a metaphor for this limitation (line 17, 18). Further, if the established association of writing with textiles is to be considered, it also serves to reiterate the metatextual nature of the poetic account in this stanza, thereby drawing attention to the speaker's process of writing before the transition to describing the nature of her subject matter.

Another precursor to her subject is the description “green angels,” along with the later references to the “tree” and the natural landscape (line 17, 18). These details serve as spatial markers that build on those of previous stanzas to indicate a pastoral setting, and by extension, brings to mind the settings common in classical pursuit accounts of woodland nymphs like Daphne and Syrinx (line 17, 18). In the six lines that follow, the speaker, elaborating on the connotation implied by her “threadbare eye,” reveals in conversation with a “doctor” her propensity to see things as they are despite her efforts to see them as she wishes (line 20). In this context, which brings to mind a conversation with a psychiatrist, she states that her recurring vision is that of a “tree” that “won’t practice wiles/ [t]o beguile sight,” the irony being that she diagnoses her rootedness in realism in a manner that a patient would describe a delusion (line 19-21). A further irony effected by this description of her inability to be taken in by the illusion that may “[c]oncoct a Daphne […] by cant of light” is its subversion of the association of the feminine with the fantastical, a theme that reappears in the closing stanza (line 22-23).

In light of the stark statement, “my tree stays a tree” in line twenty-four, the speaker opens the fourth stanza by recapitulating the theme of “imposing” her “fantasy” in writing through forceful imagery that is reminiscent of Apollo’s actions in Ovid’s account of the pursuit of Daphne (line 7, 9). Through the description of “wrench[ing] the obstinate bark” in the hope that a “luminous shape” will emerge, which brings to mind Apollo grasping at the laurel tree and “press[ing] his lips to the wood” in a desperate attempt to obtain the transformed Daphne, the speaker conveys her own relentless pursuit of her subject (line 25, 26; Ovid 1.554-6). Still, the “honest earth” that is the stark reality of her physical

surroundings "[s]purns such fiction/ [a]s nymphs" (line 28-30). Further, the description "cold vision," similarly to "threadbare eye," conveys the idea of perception devoid of embellishment or fabrication (line 18, 30). As is already suggested by the word "hoodwink" in line twenty-eight, such fabrication is a deception that will not be upheld despite her "will" to uphold it, and she is left with her unflinchingly stoic awareness that will have "no counterfeit" forced on it (line 31)

The speaker continues her unwavering rootedness in realism in the final stanza, speculating that "in [a] dream-propertied fall some moon-eyed,/Star lucky slight-of-hand man watches" her dryad (line 33-34). Through a repetition of the word "fall," which implies a place where lambs are born, the pastoral setting is reiterated, though the landscape where the man is situated contrasts starkly from the speaker's, as is conveyed by the description "dream-propertied" which indicates his ability to perceive the fantastical (line 33). The descriptions "moon-eyed" and "[s]tar-lucky" convey a romanticism and good fortune that contrasts starkly with the speaker's "threadbare eye" and "cold vision" that works tirelessly to obtain the subject that he effortlessly acquires by "slight-of-hand" (line 18, 30, 33, 34). Privy to his gaze, the "jilting lady" that is the speaker's elusive nymph "squanders coin" and "gold leaf stock ditches," the implication being that her presence brings success (line 35). This imagery is continued in the man surveying the "opulent air go studded with seed," which with its connotation excess of abundance suggests ejaculation (line 36). From this erotic image, it is implied that the nymph, who "jilt[s]" the female speaker, is content to take on the role of muse for a male author, whose writing process comes with less obstacles and garners

more financial success as a result (line 35). Conversely, the final lines describe how the speaker's "beggared brain/ [h]atches no fortune" for its inability to reproduce the subject matter that comes naturally to the man (line 34-6). The description of her mind having to "thieve what it has […] from leaves" and "grass," while suggesting a lack of material gain, also implies her attempt to eke out subject matter from a hostile environment for this reason (line 40).

The Chains of Chastity: Anne Sexton's Representation of Daphne

Sexton's poetic representation of the Daphne myth, as opposed to Plath's, places the nymph in the position of first-person speaker, shifting focus from concerns around authorship and representation conveyed through the erotic pursuit motif to the dichotomy between chastity and sexuality. In the poem, titled "Where I Live in this Honorable House of the Laurel Tree," Daphne's assertive sexuality, a subversion of her demure classical representation, is reminiscent of Millay's portrayal of her. However, consistently with its confessional nature, the forty-two-lined lament describes desire in a more detailed, and, for this reason, a more explicit manner, with the speaker expressing her regret at warding off Apollo's advances in a manner that gives the impression that she is revealing highly personal subject matter. The single-stanza structure and frequent enjambment add to this characteristic, giving the idea that the poetic account is an outpouring of the speaker's stream of consciousness. Nonetheless, the repetition of the phrase "in my wooden legs and O/ my green green hands" from the first two lines in the last serves to frame the train of thought captured in the free verse structure

between as a diversion to memory and speculation from which the nymph inevitably returns to face the limitations imposed by her transformation to a laurel tree (line1-2, 41-42).

The title refers to the physical situation of the Daphne figure following her transformation, and by extension, already conveys the idea of constraint. In addition, the description "Honorable House of the Laurel Tree" implies the institution of a moralistic school of thought, one that is revealed to be the classical ideals of chastity that Daphne conformed to in fleeing the advances of Apollo to preserve her virginity. Building on this idea, the lines with which her account opens describe her tree form with "wooden legs" and "green green hands," whereas the exclamation "O" conveys her dismay at being constrained in this state (line 1-2). A further connotation of the descriptions of her legs as "wooden" to suggest a lack of flexibility and her hands as "green" to imply naivety is her lack of sexual experience, a limitation that is the underlying concern of her address (line 1-2). In the lines that follow, she expresses her regret at having "run from [Apollo]," pre-empting the matter of her "desire" that came "too late" by declaring that "blood still runs in [her] bark-bound veins," the implication being that, despite her conformity to chaste existence as an impenetrable laurel tree, she has not been robbed of the passions natural to her former body (line 3-8).

As can already be observed in the repetition of the word "late" and the temporal marker "still" in the first eight lines, the speaker refers to time throughout her account to express the constant nature of her regret. Accordingly, "the measure" or time she "lost" through her transformation – this being her missed opportunity

at sating her desire – manifests in "each century" as she is plagued by "the trickeries/ of need," while remaining "glossed in honour" for the fate that her choice has bound her to (line 8-12). Likewise, Apollo is "gone in time," a description that reiterates that his advances are a distant memory (line 12).With the passing of time, it also becomes apparent that the speaker grows bolder in recognising her sexual desires. For instance, after conveying that her "need" spans across the passing "centur[ies]," she states that "the air rings for [Apollo]," describing her fantasy of an encounter with him as her "breathing tent undone within his light" (line 9, 12-14).

This image conjured up by the "breathing tent" is the bark of the laurel tree in the depths of which her former body "lies" (line 8, 14). Through the "undo[ing]" of this exterior, both a reversal of her transformation to tree form and the act of undressing before sexual intercourse is implied (line 14). A further indicator of the progression of time lies in words that express her desire, which grow more explicit as her account continues, as with the succession of "desire" and "need" with "lust" (line 7, 9, 15). The description of "lust" as "untimely" again conveys that Daphne finds herself in a time after her elusion of Apollo's advances, whereas the fact that this sensation "toss[es] flesh at the wind," in its resemblance to the saying "tossing caution to the wind" expresses her increased lack of inhibition (line 15-16). The "mov[ing]" of her "fears toward the intimate Rome of myth" suggests that the qualms that drove her to flee from Apollo is a thing of the past, and, by extension, that the classical values pertaining to chastity and honour that accompany the tale of her pursuit no longer apply to her (line 16-17).

Rather, the "unease" that plagues her in her present situation is her "spill[ing] towards the stars in the empty years" where she "builds the air with [her] crown of honor" (line 18-20). The "spilling towards the stars" suggests the position of her branches that reach into the air, whereas the image conjured up by "build[ing] the air with [a] crown of honor" is that of the physical laurel tree in its height as well as the laurel wreath Apollo crafted out of it as a symbol of athletic prestige (line 20). In employing these associations ironically to describe her position, Daphne implies that her tree form, which stands as a symbol for the hollow honour that fleeing the advances of Apollo brought her, is enduring proof of her chastity. In the lines that follow, she reiterates her sexual appetite as a sensation that is "out of time," whereas her statement that she was "giv[en] honor too soon" conveys that her attitude towards her chastity has changed over the years lived as a laurel tree (line 21-22). Through stating that "[t]here is no one left who understands/ how [she] wait[s]," she conveys that she is out of place in the world she now inhabits, trapped in the "wooden legs" and "green hands" of the "Honorable House" that is the relic of outdated ideals of chastity (line 23-26).

Halting the Chase: Edna St. Vincent Millay's Dominant Dryad

In her poem "Daphne," Millay alters the classical pattern of erotic pursuit, introduced in Ovid's account through the seduction speech of Apollo, by casting Daphne as a first person speaker who halts the chase to conduct a speech of her own that foregrounds her response to the god's advances. Through this dynamic, the nymph is transformed from prey, the elusive object of male desire, to an

autonomous subject who controls her own sexuality. This contrasts significantly with Ovid's third-person portrayal of Daphne as a silent, chaste love interest, and serves to position her as a figure responsible for her own representation and, by extension, her own fate. The nymph recounts her reaction to the god's advances in the space of three rhyming triplets, of which the tight structure conveys the confident nature of her response that contrasts considerably with the terror attributed to her in Ovid. A further dimension of this sense of control lies in the use of rhyme, which functions to attribute to the speaker a playful tone that reflects the power she wields over Apollo, whom she tantalises with her presence that is always just beyond his reach. Through this dynamic between speaker and addressee, Millay subverts the perception of desire as a force that enslaves, often devised in classical myth to excuse the sexual violence male gods who proclaim to be "love's victim" inflict on female figures, to demote Apollo to a presence that is considerably less threatening than his classical counterpart (Stewart in Reeder 75). The god is thus cast as a helpless slave to the desire that compels him to continue the futile "chase" of his mocking temptress (line 4).

The shift in power from Apollo to Daphne is already implied by the title, "Daphne," that inverts Ovid's account, which, although similarly titled, ironically favours the perspective of the god by introducing the nymph as "[his] first love," thereby privileging his desire (1.28). For this reason, Millay's revisionist portrayal of Daphne foregrounds her perspective and excludes that of her pursuer entirely. The first stanza introduces the subversion of the expected power dynamic with the question, "[w]hy do you follow me?" that the nymph poses to Apollo, which introduces her position as speaker and the god's as silent addressee (line 1).

Further, it frames the address as a moment when the pursuit is halted as Daphne, refusing to act like prey, turns to face her pursuer, returning his lustful gaze in defiance. Her use of the word "follow," considerably less forceful than the language of desire and pursuit in the classical accounts, does away with the metaphorical language of the hunt, which as observed by Lopéz Maistre represents "a manifest asymmetry in the hunter/prey binomial" in that it "represent[s] the desired [...] as different kinds of *prey* or *wild animals*, who are the targets of the male hunter" (*male is hunter/predator*, *female is prey*) (line 1; 98, emphasis in original). In this light, Daphne's use of "follow" conveys that she has the upper hand in this interaction (*male follows*, *female leads*), and that its outcome is her prerogative (line 1). Instead of making use of the appropriative language typical of an erotic pursuit, which aims to subjugate the female party, she describes the interaction as a "chase," creating a more playful dynamic where she mocks the god's futile attempt to capture her (line 4). In the last lines of the stanza, Daphne's confidence implied by her opening question remains evident as she states the impending possibility of transformation with the words "any moment I can be/ [n]othing but a laurel tree" (line 2-3). Like Thetis, she has the power to change her form at will, which implies a mutability absent in her classical counterpart's reliance on the intervention of river god Peneus that culminates in the transformation confining her to the stagnancy of her tree form (Ovid 1.544-552).

The second stanza continues to build on the idea of Daphne's mutability and the underlying implication of the power she wields over her fate and form. In reiterating that she can change form at will, Daphne challenges the classical

notion of the chaste female figure who flees erotic advances to preserve virginity. The teasing tone present in the previous stanza intensifies in her assertion that "at any moment of the chase" she can "leave […] a pink bough for [Apollo's] embrace/ […]," which suggests that Daphne, should she give in to the god's advances, will do so on her terms (lines 4-6). Her warning that she may transform, apart from asserting autonomy, serves to entice Apollo with the prospect of embracing her while simultaneously mocking him with the fact that she will refuse to relinquish her body as he desires it. To convey this dynamic, the imagery of the "pink bough" that Daphne might conjure up "in [her] place" brings to mind the idea of a vanishing act, or, more fitting to the erotic implications of her mockery, that of a mirage (line 5-6). It is the enticing nature of the mirage, as a projection of desire that hovers just beyond its recipient's reach and dupes him with the notion of its attainability only to drop the façade to reveal a barren reality upon being reached, that is echoed in the deceptive allure that Daphne implements by tantalising Apollo in bodily form with the intention to transform to a tree before he can reach her.

In the final stanza, Daphne continues to recount the incessant nature of Apollo's pursuit, which in the context of her mockery exposes the power she holds over him. For instance, he "follow[s]" her "over hill and hollow," which implies that they have covered a great distance, while the word "still" conveys that the chase has been underway for an extended period of time (line 7-8). This suggests that the god is a slave to his desire, but, unlike the classical representations of this force that attribute the ability to subjugate to male figures, this account portrays male subjection to desire as a circumstance that female figures can use to their

advantage. The abruptness of the final line indicates Daphne's command of the situation, with the phrase "I am off" expressing her unwavering confidence in her ability to elude her admirer's grip (line 9). Likewise, the expression "to heel" implies a brusqueness in tone, and brings to mind the kind of command that would be directed at a misbehaving dog expected to follow close behind its owner (line 9). Followed by the first use of the god Apollo's name in the entire address, this association is significant in implying that Daphne, as the driving force that orchestrates the chase, is in command of his sensibilities, and, by extension, his continued participation in her schemes. This dynamic is particularly apparent when the way in which the metaphor of the hunt is subverted in this poetic account is taken into consideration. The imagery from Ovid that likens Apollo to a "hound" and Daphne to a "hare" is re-appropriated, changing the portrayal of Daphne as prey to that of a figure who commands the "hound" chasing her (1.532-38), and under these circumstances, the pursuer is demoted from ferocious predator to lap dog to comic effect (line 9).

Figure in the Tree: H.D's Search for the Spirit of Daphne

Adhering to imagist criteria, H.D. constructs her poetic re-appropriation of the Daphne myth titled "Pursuit" to "elaborate[e] around [a] central image" which foregrounds what is omitted in Ovid's account – the wounding of the landscape and the female body during the course of an erotic pursuit (Mackay 56). As previously stated, the focus that this poetic account places on the flight of the unnamed female figure, reminiscent of Daphne for her association with the

wooded landscape, dissects this motif to convey the extent of her suffering in a manner that Ovid's account fails to convey. In the space of ten stanzas, the introspective first-person speaker revises the stages of an erotic pursuit by focusing solely on the movements of the female figure, whose course of flight is followed by identifying the traces she leaves on the landscape. Through phrases like "the heel is cut deep," and "purple buds […]/ show deep purple/ where your heel pressed," the underlying image of wounding is conveyed in relation to the landscape (line 5, 13-15). These initial associations with bruising are then extended to the body of the female figure herself, which is described with strikingly similar phrases that evoke plant allusions such as "[y]our hand caught at this," "you dragged a bruised thigh," and "your head, bent back" (line 28, 40, 41). Through this progression from landscape to body, the focus shifts from the flight of the female figure, which results in the damaging of the landscape, to the effects of the flight on her own body that grows increasingly weary, to the point where she "stammer[s] with short breath and gasp[s]" a plea for "life" to the "wood-daemons" as a last resort (line 46-8).

Apart from the development of the pursuit narrative through the imagery of wounding and deterioration, progression is also conveyed through the lyrical aspects of the poetic account that manifest in an irregular stanza structure and variation in tone. The first variation becomes apparent as the longer sections among the first stanzas that set the scene of the pursuit through detailed, measured descriptions give way to shorter stanzas that describe the female figure in the moment of flight, recounted in a rapid tone evoked through exclamation marks and less encumbered sentences to reflect this focus (lines 1-24, 24-40). In the

eighth and ninth stanzas, another change occurs as the tone shifts from the language that conveys the mobility of the moment of pursuit to expressions that suggests the standstill when the female figure can no longer run (lines 41-48). Here, the account shifts from narration to questions to convey the uncertainty of the speaker, who to this point was able to trace the trail left by the Daphne-figure without difficulty (lines 41-48). The tension of this uncertainty is accentuated by the climactic moment where the female figure herself speaks to beg the "wood daemons" to intervene (lines 47-48). The resulting transformation to a tree is implied by omission. Finally, the concluding stanza resorts to a resigned tone, the speaker ending her search for the female figure who has ultimately eluded her without a trace (lines 49-52). In effect, this ending, which contrasts starkly with the Daphne-figure's entrapment as a laurel tree in Ovid's account, implies not only her avoidance of being subjugated by her pursuer, but also her escape from narrative appropriation at the hands of the speaker who attempts to piece together the outcome of her tale (line 47-50).

The first three stanzas set the scene of the erotic pursuit through the speaker's measured, meticulous examination of the landscape that bears traces of the damage caused by the female figure's flight. Already in the first stanza, the idea of bruising is introduced by her footprints that mar the "stream" which is "trampled" and the "stream bank" that holds "the print of [her] foot" (line 2-4). This is accentuated by the description of her "heel" that "cut deep" to leave the print, and the "mark/ on the grass ridge of the bank" (line 5). The idea that the speaker is following her trail is conveyed through the succession of spatial markers such as the "stream," the "stream bank," its "grass ridge" and the "wood

path" which implies movement (line 2, 3, 7, 8). Further, the slow pace of the narration conveyed through the attention to detail along with the temporal marker "still," which refers to the preserved footprint on the "stream-bank," serves to position the speaker outside of the moment of the pursuit, implying that her account takes place in its aftermath (line 4). Building on the moment where the speaker loses the "the third" footprint in the "packed earth" which concludes the first stanza, the second stanza continues with a rediscovery of the trail signalled by the "wild-hyacinth stalk" which has "snapped" (line 9-10, 11-12). This stark description of damage done to the vegetation, emphasised by the further detail of its "purple buds" that "show deep purple where [her] heel pressed," continues the imagery of wounding introduced previously (line 13-15). Finally, the third stanza, which is similar in length to the first, also conveys the movement of the speaker along the trail that the female figure left behind through the description of a succession of landmarks. The first of these is the "patch of flowering grass" which she "brushed" against in the course of her flight (line 16, 18). The "green stems" that show "yellow-green" where her foot "lifted," apart from serving as the next spatial marker, are reminiscent of the "snapped […] hyacinth stalk" with its trampled, "deep purple" buds, and likewise conjure up the image of a bruise (line 12-5, 19-20). The significance of the trampled "green stems" as a part of the trail that the speaker follows is emphasised by the phrase "turned […] to the light," which implies that the path taken by the female figure is exposed through her contact with the landscape (line 20). In a similar manner, the "dead leaf spine" that is "split across" also serves to reveal "where [she] passed" (line 22, 23).

From the fourth stanza, there is a shift in tone as the speaker transitions from describing the traces of the pursuit through markings on the landscape to focusing on the female figure in the moment of flight, and, in so doing, on the bruising of her body in the course of the chase. The repetition of the word "swift" in line 25 emphasises the increased tempo of the narration as it begins to convey the process of the pursuit directly. This change in tempo heightens the tension as the narrative picks up pace in anticipation of the outcome of the chase, an aspect suggested by the landscape that grows increasingly treacherous with its "forest ledge[s]" that "slope" and its "rain furrowed roots" which make escape difficult (line 26-27). The description of her "hand [catching] at" the root, which "snap[s] under [her] weight," foreshadows the injuries she will sustain later in the account, introducing the association of her body with the wooded landscape (line 28-29). This dynamic is continued in the fifth stanza, with the reference to the speaker "follow[ing] the note/ where it touched this slender tree" suggesting traces of the female figure in the landscape similar to the physical markings left in the first three stanzas (line 30-31). However, at this point in the chase, her transformation – the process of becoming one with the landscape – is implied. The idea that the speaker is following her trail is continued as the "note" is "answered" by "the next" tree "and the next" (line 32-33). The fact that this "note" is "almost follow[ed]," though, introduces the first traces of uncertainty in the speaker, who begins to doubt her ability to trace her subject (line 30).

Nonetheless, the narration in the sixth stanza resumes with the speaker identifying physical traces of the female figure's path by identifying the tracks she left "yet further" up the "slope" (line 26, 34). As with previous repetitions of the word

"swift," the word "whirled" serves to imply the speed of her flight (line 36). In addition, the description suggests tension, and, in combination with the detail that she "doubl[es] on her track," suggests that the chase has reached a point where her flight grows increasingly desperate as the difficulties brought about by the steep terrain force her to turn back the way she came (line 36, 37). This growing tension intensifies in the stanza that follows as she "fall[s] on the downward slope" and is incapacitated by the injury that causes her to "limp" (line 39, 40). As was implied by her "hand" that "caught" on the "root" that "snapped" previously, this fall associates the wounding of the landscape during the course of the chase with the damage done to her body in the process, suggested at this point of the account by her "clutch[ing]" at a "larch" for support as she "drag[s]" her "bruised thigh" after the fall (line 28-29, 40- 41). The image that this action of "drag[ging]" the limb conjures up in combination with the proximity of the tree is that of a broken branch, which alongside the "bruised thigh" recalls the plant imagery from earlier stanzas of the "snapped […] wild-hyacinth stalk" with its trampled "purple buds" that show "deep purple/ where [her] heel pressed" (line 39-41, 12-15). This mirroring of the first stanzas in the later ones, apart from creating the central image of a wounded, deteriorating body battered by the process of erotic pursuit which manifests firstly in the form of the wooded landscape and after in that of the female figure, also achieves a complex allusion to the classical Daphne transformed to a laurel tree in its consistent employment of references to plants and trees.

In the eighth and ninth stanzas – which stand apart from the first seven in that the speaker's tone shifts from narrating details around the process of erotic pursuit

through a careful consideration of the marks left on the landscape to expressing uncertainty around its outcome as the tracks of the female figure stop – the allusion to Daphne is made more explicit as the climactic moment of transformation is considered. Each is presented in the form of a single question starting with the word "[d]id" to convey the speaker's speculations concerning what transpires in the moment where the tension reaches its zenith and the female figure, unable to run with her "bruised thigh," pleads for the intervention of the "wood daemons" (line 40, 42, 45). Through the description of the "larch" with its "green leaf moss" and the repetition of the word "clutched," both of these stanzas build on the closing lines of the seventh stanza in their employment of similar words (line 43-44, 45). The first question considers the actions of the female figure directly after she "clutch[es]" the "larch," this being that she arches her neck to scour her surroundings for any possibility of escape (line 41-44). As is achieved through the previous description of "drag[ging]" the "thigh," the words "bent back" that describe the motion of turning the head gives the idea of a strained branch, an image strengthened by the more detailed references to the tree next to her that follow (line 40, 42). Apart from contributing to the central image of the poetic account, the sensations implied by a "head/ bent back" are fear and desperation, emotions developed in the stanza that follows (line 42). The repetition of the word "clutch" as the speaker speculates the female figure's subsequent actions through the second question, apart from serving as a temporal marker that indicates that she still finds herself in the moments shortly after her fall in which she "limped" to clutch at the "larch," indicates the growing tension as she realises that she is unable to move (line 45).

The implied anxiety of this action grows as she "stammers with short breath" when she is finally moved to speech as a last resort (line 46). The extent of the deterioration that her body has been subject to during the course of flight, to this point implied most prominently through words that conjure up images of the damaged branches of a tree, is brought to a climax in her plea for "life" that is uttered with a "gasp" as she concedes that she is "almost lost" (line 46-48). While the detail that she expresses her plea "with short breath" is consistent with the distance run, the agitation brought about by the fall and the imminent approach of her pursuer, the circumstances around this moment of crises indicate that the deterioration implied consistently throughout the chase has accumulated to a breaking point (line 46). The female figure's plea addressed to the "wood daemons" (*daemon* is the Greek word for "spirit") in the hope that they will "grant life," one repeated in the line following with the formulation "give life" to emphasise its urgency, implies that her physical resilience has ultimately expired (line 47-48). When the recipients of her address, these being the wood spirits, are considered alongside the nature of the "life" she is requesting, then, it is implied that the words that she utters as she "is almost lost" lead to a revitalisation through her transformation to a form like theirs (line 47-48). This transformation, which is more explicitly alluded to in the final stanza, is significant in that it is a moment where the landscape and the female figure's body, which were similarly battered during the pursuit, become one in a dimension where such bruising is no longer possible, a fate that was denied the Daphne of classical myth confined to a physical form in which her pursuer could still possess her (line 47-48).

Building on the questions posed in the preceding two stanzas, the speaker's tone shifts a final time in the tenth stanza as the speculation around the outcome of the pursuit is halted with the conjunction "[f]or" that introduces the conclusion of the poetic account, this being an anti-climactic admission that the female figure has been rendered untraceable through her transformation (line 49-52). The adjective "some" that precedes "wood-daemon" emphasises the speaker's uncertainty pertaining to the particular course of events as well as the exact identity of the force that brought about her transformation (line 49). The repetition of "wood daemon," this time in the form of a statement rather than a question, serves to re-affirm some of the speculation of the preceding stanzas, particularly the nature of the female figure's transformation (line 49). Thus, the intervention of the spirit that has "lightened [her] steps" corroborates the moment implied in lines 47-48 when she takes on a form like that of the "wood daemons" (line 49, 50). The word "lightened," apart from indicating that she has become spirit, also infers the regenerative quality of this transformation, which is described in the closing lines that outline its implications (line 50). The speaker thus admits that "no trace" of her can be found, from which it can be deduced that she has successfully eluded her pursuer's grasp as well as constraint to the narrative of the poetic account which throughout has centred around the act of tracing the course of the pursuit through the tangibility of physical markings (line 51). The liberation that comes with the "lightening" of the female figure's "steps," then, is an annulment of the bruising of the wooded landscape, a circumstance previously necessitated by her movements, and ultimately, when her transition from bodily form to spirit form is

to be considered, the erasure of the damage done to her body in the course of the pursuit as she is "grant[ed] life" (line 47, 52).

Conclusion

Building on the detailed close readings in this chapter, which revise the metaphor of the hunt as it appears in Daphne's tale in different ways, I conclude with a brief discussion of my own poem titled "Daphne" to consciously consider the nymph as a victim of sexual violence. As H.D.'s "Pursuit" develops the image of bruising to convey sexual violence, I develop a motif of wounding in my poetic account to convey the trauma of unprocessed memories. However, unlike H.D.'s Daphne, rendered untraceable as she is transformed to a spirit, my autobiographical first-person speaker constructs a moment when the touch of a tree evokes contact with a sympathetic Daphne figure, a moment of connection when the experience of unwanted sexual advances can be acknowledged and processed (line 1). Through words that convey the idea of physical scars, such as "marks […] on [the] body" and the sensation of "severed limbs," she conveys the psychological damage that haunts her long after the encounters took place in a manner that builds on the moment of physical contact with the "tree" that "brushes against [her]" to pre-empt the allusion to Daphne that will follow (line 1, 2-3, 4-6). The speaker revisits the moment of contact with the tree in the second stanza, humanising the "branches" that "gently finge[r]" her body as the empathising presence of the nymph (line 7-10). In this light, the final two lines imply the significance of this moment of physical contact through the words of Daphne, who identifies the perpetrator in the speaker's memory as an Apollo-type with the words, "he's

chased me too" (line 12). Through this parallel, the moment when tree and speaker touch becomes not only a moment of physical comfort, but also one where the world of the author and the world of classical myth overlap through shared experience, an aspect of revisionary mythopoeia that I intend to explore more fully in poetic representations of Medusa and Leda.

CHAPTER 3

"The Muse as Medusa":

Perceptions of Female Power and Female Expression in Poetic Re-appropriations of Medusa's Transformation

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While the erotic pursuit of Daphne discussed in the previous chapter represents the metaphor of the hunt in its most basic form, the classical accounts of Medusa add more dimension, particularly in their representations of violence and female power. When the figure Medusa is considered, monstrosity and a petrifying gaze are the aspects that immediately come to mind, and many contemporary representations of her include little beyond these traits. The classical texts that describe her also provide meagre background, the most detailed being those in the second book of Apollodoros' *Bibliotheca* and the twenty-five lines in Ovid's *Metamorphoses*. The less known narrative of the circumstances surrounding her transformation to a Gorgon, vaguely captured in Hesiod and later elaborated in Ovid, therefore finds little to no engagement in modern and contemporary poetic re-appropriations of her tale. Yet, in this part of her tale, many of the basic elements of the classical erotic pursuit motif can be found, such as the irresistible beauty that causes a female figure to be "admired too well," the spurning of suitors in devotion to a virgin goddess, the seduction (or rape) by a lustful god that will lead to the birth of remarkable offspring and transformation at the hands of a vengeful goddess in the aftermath (Ovid 1.546). Though she enjoys little

agency in classical myth, transformed into a Gorgon as punishment and decapitated for the power of her gaze, she is granted new power in theoretical engagements with her tale. Through these, she comes to embody a retributive force in the context of classical myth, with a petrifying gaze that turns the objectifying male gaze, which is the start of every erotic pursuit, back onto itself, rendering the would-be pursuer an object. Apart from the destructive power of petrification, however, Medusa also embodies a dynamic force as a source of creative inspiration, which is the focus of this chapter, as conveyed in the title of Sarton's poem "The Muse as Medusa." What she captures in this description of the Gorgon is her ability to pass on creative inspiration, a "gift" she grants to women who draw from her tale, as she metes out destruction on the men who objectify her (line 28). Exploring these contradictory aspects of the Medusa – her monstrosity/beauty and her power to petrify/grant creative inspiration – the poems that will be read in this chapter are Sarton's "The Muse as Medusa" (1971), which captures the Gorgon's connections to creative inspiration, Duffy's "Medusa" (1999), which portrays her transformation as a result of rage in response to infidelity, and Clampitt's "Medusa" (1999), which considers her a sympathetic figure who inflicts petrification as a defence mechanism.

Every classical tale of erotic pursuit begins with the gaze, as a male sees a beautiful female and is overcome with desire, as is the case in Medusa's tale. The ancient Greek conceptions of desire, are elucidated by Andrew Stewart, who states that "[t]he Greeks were well aware of the erotic power of the glance, […] especially of its tendency to inflame the desire of both parties alike," which is evident in the direction of the gaze in fifth century Athenian vase paintings

depicting erotic pursuit which conveyed erotic undertones (in Reeder 79). A "backward glance" on the part of the fleeing female party, for example, "hints [at] […] sexual curiosity," even "acquiescence" (Stewart in Reeder 79). It is significant that Medusa's transformation also takes place as a result of such a glance, as Neptune, enthralled by her beauty, rapes her in Minerva's temple (Ovid 4.793-98). However, in the aftermath of her sexual assault, the transformation that she undergoes subverts this dynamic significantly. Through the vengeful handiwork of "the Asexual Athena," the virgin goddess whose temple was defiled by the act – what Reeder refers to as the "powerful impact upon a man of a female's gaze" (410) – is transformed from the beauty that inflames desire to the monstrous "gaze" that "kill[s] men by turning them into stone," as Gillian Alban notes (2).

Whereas this appears to be a transformation that empowers Medusa, an opportunity to avenge the injustice inflicted on her by a licentious male by granting her "a demonic female sexual energy" (Reeder 410) that will ward off any further advances, it is also described by Ovid as Minerva's "punishment" of "the sin" that took place in her domain, a noteworthy element being the absence of the perpetrator as it is inflicted (4.801). In A. D. Melville's translation, the hero Perseus describes Medusa's punishment in the face of the goddess's "outrage" as an outcome that is "deserved," one that "serve[s] as [an] awful warning of her vengeance" (Ovid 4.800-803). However, what makes this transformation particularly significant is its duality. Firstly, it is a drastic change in form that involves the stripping away of the person who existed before the offence, a fate

that generally befalls mortals who anger female deities.[6] Further, it is the creation of a being who is an extension of her transformer's own nature – a powerful asset in combat and an apotrepic force that repels the male gaze. Alban, for example, describes her as Minerva's "dark aspect" (2). In her sensuality, she is a reflection of the attribute that the goddess shuns in herself yet secretly values, and in her monstrosity post-transformation, she is rendered an extension of the goddess's own repulsion of sexuality as well as an asset to her power as a warrior deity.[7] Even as Medusa suffers the transformation that deprives her of her identity and the final injustice of decapitation, she is still a distinctly creative source in Ovid's representation as her offspring Pegasus digs the fountain of the Muses with his hooves (5.259-64), an outcome Lynn Enterline describes as a "metaphoric story" that serves as an "account of the origin of poetry" (79).

While many of the themes that woman writers implement in their poetic re-appropriations of Medusa can be derived from the classical representations themselves, much engagement has been devoted to her metaphoric association with the process of writing in secondary criticism. Enterline describes how Ovid names her as the "mother" of the "Heliconian fountain of poetry" (79), which, by extension, associates her with the Muses, as Alban notes in her naming of the

[6] A primary motivation in the transformation of female offenders is often jealousy, as in the case of Arachne, made a spider for surpassing Minerva in skill at the loom. In this light, it is noteworthy that Apollodorus names Medusa's extraordinary beauty as a motivator for Minerva's punishment – a factor that results not only in the defilement of her temple, but also in a contender for her own beauty.

[7] Minerva, though strictly a virgin goddess, still wishes to be acknowledged for her beauty, as her contest with Venus and Juno which sparked the events leading to the Trojan War indicates.

Gorgon as "Medusa or Musa" (2). The significance of her decapitation, which culminates in her bringing forth poetic inspiration, is the use of her severed head as a symbol to theorise about the writing process, particularly where it applies to women. Whereas her association with the arts in the classical tradition implies the glimmer of autonomy absent in the rest of her tale, it is in the symbolic quality she takes on as a muse for female artists that she truly begins to surpass the limitations placed on her in the writings of male authors. Alban, for instance, coins the phrase "accessing Medusa's dread power," which serves as a force that can "enable women to rise above oppression through her *inspiration*" (Alban 2, my emphasis), what Bowers defines as an "electrifying force" that "represent[s] the dynamic power of the female gaze" to convey the idea of creative influence (in Alban 2).

Adriana Cavarero, on the other hand, writes on the horror that accompanies violence to reflect on the significance of her transformation and decapitation, stating that "Medusa alludes to a human essence that, deformed in its very being, contemplates the unprecedented act of its own dehumanization," and that her "severed head is the symbol of that which extreme violence has chosen for its object" (16). She also considers the etymology of "the name Gorgon," stating that it is derived from a series of "Greek verbs that can be connected to the sanskrit '*garg*' and allude to the emission of a gutteral sound, a howl, a cry not very different from the one warriors emit in battle" (16). Whereas Medusa, in her decapitated state, cannot not utter this cry, the sight of the "wide-open mouth" devoid of "acoustic vibration" speaks of the horror of what she was subjected to and unsettles the onlooker (Cavarero 17). As her gaze does not lose the power to

petrify once Perseus cuts off her head, her gaping, motionless mouth, reminiscent of the open cavity of her neck that birthed the winged horse Pegasus and the fountain of the Muses, still serves as a source of inspiration, a silent testimony to the violence inflicted on her.

As Sanja Bahun-Radunović and Julie Rajan aptly state, "contemporary women writers and artists […] find in myth[…] an adequate means to negotiate against various forms of violence, including those specifically against women," which aids them in "explor[ing] their own present-day social and artistic struggles" (5). This is a feat made possible by describing the injustices they have been subject to by drawing from tales such as Medusa's. The horror evoked by such testimony to violence– the visual in classical myth made audible through the transformation brought on by its re-appropriations by women that give Medusa a voice – is one that terrifies the male recipient and inspires the female. Enterline uses the word "*os*," which conveys the idea of a face or countenance, and, by extension that of a mouth (*oris*), to express concepts such as the "poetic voice" and "mode of utterance" (16). Building on this concept, she considers "Medusa's story" as Ovid's iteration of an "avenging *os*" that consists of "a frightening pair of lips that constitute an internal form of protest against, and revenge for, the male rhetoric of vocal animation" (Enterline 79).

Ultimately, the essence of the Gorgon's tale, in classical myth as well as theoretical engagement, is captured in the gaze. Its force begins as captivating, and kindles the lust of Neptune as well as the wrath of Minerva, then transforms to petrifying as the punishment that avenges these outcomes. Yet, the vengeance

is not meted out on her alone, but also on the gender that defiled her and appropriated her, as Freud expresses in stating that "the horrifying decapitated head of Medusa" signifies "castrat[ion]," the severing of the member representative of that gender (273). What brings on this horror, the realisation of the vengeance that may soon be inflicted, is "the terror of Medusa" which is "a terror of castration […] linked *to the sight of something*" (Freud 273, my emphasis). This thing, according to Freud, which the gaze of the decapitated Gorgon represents, is "the female genitals," which, for its lack of penis "causes […] horror" in the man who "*catches sight of*" it and is faced with the realisation that he may lose his (Freud 273, my emphasis). In the context of sexual assault (an aspect of Medusa's tale that is often overlooked) as well as metaphorical representations of the writing process and gendered expression, this retribution is significant.

The process of writing, as Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar observe, is described by various male authors in terms of the writer's "[p]en" serving as "a metaphorical penis" (3). John T. Irwin, for instance, theorises concerning the author's relationship with the text by placing "'the masculine self with the feminine-masculine work'" and "the phallic pen on the 'pure space' of the virgin page … [where] the [author's] self is continually spent and wasted'" (in Gilbert and Gubar 5, 6). This description conveys the process of authorship as impregnation, and, by extension, penetration, which is reminiscent of the conception of masculinity as active and femininity as passive. In a similar manner, Anne Cranny-Francis engages with the patriarchal notion that the act of writing involves the wielding of the "bod[y]" as an "instrument[…] of power" by

unpacking Susan Friedman's metaphor of the "instrumental penis/phallus" as a penetrating pen that "conceives thought" (Cranny-Francis 37; Friedman in Cranny-Francis 35). Taking this appropriative imagery into account, the connection between sexual violence and the metaphor of gendered writing is easy to identify, particularly when acknowledging that the rhetorical eloquence attributed to male parties in the context of classical accounts of erotic pursuit compared to the relative silence of their love objects significantly foregrounds the male perspective. In this light, what Enterline describes as the "male rhetoric of vocal animation" in classical myth is often built on "the origins of poetry in rape and the power of the would-be rapist's voice" (79).[8] The Medusa, a figure victimised in classical myth by sexual assault and decapitation ,[9] serves as a revision of the penetrative imagery described by Enterline as she is transformed by female theorists to a "volatile," retributive "femininity" that petrifies [10] the male gender that exploited her with their gaze and inspires a female creative process that castrates the phallic pen of male expression (Garber and Vickers 3).

Though Medusa, is a retributive figure, she is not only a destructive force. In her essay, "The Laugh of the Medusa," Cixous sets out to redefine the metaphorics of female anatomy and female art, which Freud in his iterations of "penis envy" and male theorists in their phallic conceptualisations of the writing process consider

[8] Such as Ovid's "Apollo and Daphne."
[9] In Greek thought, decapitation is the equivalent of erasing the "uniqueness," or the essence of her "person," a violation that may be equated to the intrusive, destructive act of sexual assault in its stripping of a person's dignity (Cavarero 15).
[10] It is significant that the act of petrification turns the objectifying gaze of the onlooker on himself, thereby rendering him an object.

lacking, using the Medusa as a metaphor for a female expression that strikes fear into these subjugating male voices, "the trembling Perseuses moving backwards towards [her], clad in apotropes" (Cixous 367-8). As a representation of "castration" (Freud 273), she embodies a threat to the penetrative male pen, the penis that in the past suppressed the female voice and body, avenging this act by throwing off the shackles of "lack" that men have imposed on her and asserting the creative generation that stems from her own reproductive member (Cixous 366-7). With the reverberating mantra "*woman for [toward] women,"*Cixous's defiant speaker "rethink[s] womankind with every form and every period of her body," asserting that the complexities of "female sexuality" also produce spheres of "imaginary that [are] inexhaustible" and consist of "practice[s]" that are "extraordinarily rich and *inventive*" and are "accompanied by a production of forms," the "composition [of] something beautiful" (363-4, 356, my emphasis). Another image that Cixous implements to signify the creative nature of the female body, and by extension, female expression, is pregnancy, what she describes as "the gestational drive" that culminates in "a desire to live self from within, a desire for the swollen belly, for language, for blood" (374). This process involves the "adding to life an other," in other words, the opposite of the "lack" that male tradition has ascribed to women (Cixous 375, 366-7). It is the passing down of self, of ideas and identity, to the next generation, a means of making one's voice *live on* as Medusa's creative nature lived on through the birthing of Pegasus, of poetry.

Classical Representations of the Medusa

The earliest written fragment of Medusa's story appears in Hesiod's *Theogony*, and describes how "the Dark-haired One," Poseidon,[11] "lay with" Medusa "in a soft meadow amid spring flowers" (line 278). Lefkowitz identifies such "beautiful [woodland] settings" as typical of what she calls "abductions or seductions," instances where a male god lures a virgin to a union that "invariably" results in "remarkable" offspring "famous for their strength or intelligence" (54, 57). She observes that it is the beauty of the scenery that proves "irresistible" for innocent virgins, who, taught to preserve their virtue, would be seduced by their surroundings before allowing a male pursuer near them (Lefkowitz 60). For this reason, male gods primarily orchestrate their encounters with virgins by approaching them in these spaces, blending in with the scenery. They achieve this by transforming to an animal or impersonating the deity the virgins seek,[12] a phenomenon described as "deception (*klemma*)" (Euripides 1.20-23). As mentioned previously, it is the setting of the meadow, often amid flowers, that serves as the backdrop for many of these "decept[ions]," and senses such as scent, sight and touch play an integral role diverting the attentions of the virgins from their impending violation (Lefkowitz 60). Persephone, for instance, is snatched (*harpazõ*[13]) by Hades as she is enthralled by a narcissus in the meadow where she

[11] Neptune in Ovid.
[12] For instance, Zeus takes on the form of a bull to approach Europa, whereas he dupes Callisto by impersonating Diana. (Ovid 2.401-530; 2.833-875).
[13] In the *Homeric Hymn to Demeter*, the verb ἥρπασε (hērpase), aorist for ἁρπάζω (harpazõ), meaning "to snatch away," is used (line 914; Evelyn-White 1914). Mary

picks flowers with her companions (*Homeric Hymn*, lines 15-26). Whereas Medusa's encounter with Poseidon is not explicitly construed as such a "seduction" tale, the specific description of the setting as "a soft meadow amid spring flowers" leads the reader to understand it as such (Theogony 279).

In Pindar's ode titled *Pythian 12*, there are subtle allusions to the allure that accompanies the Medusa, though her encounter with Poseidon and the transformation that results are omitted. It details how "Pallas Athena" came to "w[eave] into music the dire dirge of the reckless Gorgons" that the hero "Perseus heard" after "he did away with their third sister" (line 9-10, 11). The apparent contradiction in describing Medusa as "beautiful" while classifying her as one of "the monstrous race of Phorcus" reflects the ambiguity of her fragmentary mythological representation (line 15-16). Whereas her placement as the love object in a seduction scene in Hesiod's *Theogony* implies that she is beautiful, archaic visual portrayals of the Medusa often depicted her as monstrous, implying that this detail was also present in oral and written versions of her tale at the time (*Theogony* 279; Wilson 232). Lillian Wilson discusses development of the representations of the Medusa on vase paintings and coins from fearful apotrepic [14]decorations known as "[G]orgon masks" to "soften[ed]" depictions of her face termed the "beautiful […] Medusa [types]" that began to appear from "the latter part of the fifth century," the time frame in which Pindar was writing (Wilson

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Keller asserts that this verb that expresses the act of seizing is "always associated with acts of violence," the subjugation of an unwilling captive (44).

[14] Derived from the Greek preposition *apo* (άπο) meaning "away" and the verb "trepein" (τρεπειν) meaning "to turn," which combines to convey the meaning "to turn away" or "to ward off."

238). Throughout his ode, the poet characterises the music that commemorates Medusa in a manner similar to these ambiguous descriptions of the Gorgon. Whereas the sound of the "dirge" uttered by the other Gorgons when she dies is "shrill," which implies a harsh sound, it is also alluring, a detail made apparent through Athena's imitation that "entices people to gather at contests" (line 9-10, 20-25). Further, the tune resounds "through reeds" near the "city of the Graces," goddesses of beauty and human creativity (line 25). While this is an additional association of the "dire dirge" with beauty, it also serves to connect the Gorgon's tale with artistic expression, in the words of Garber and Vickers, an "identification of Medusa and her Gorgon sisters as the origin of a popular music entitled 'the many headed tune'" that serves to "establish[h] a connection between Medusa and the arts" (line 9; 14).

In the second book of the compendium of Greek myth titled *Bibliotheca* attributed to Apollodorus, the feats of Perseus are recounted in great detail, among these the circumstances around his quest to behead the Medusa and how he achieved the task. It is his defiance of the ruler Polydectes who desires to marry his mother Danae that results in his being sent "to bring the Gorgon's head," a feat that is achieved with the aid of the deities Hermes and Athena (2.4.2). As is the case in Pindar's rendition of the Medusa, the *Bibliotheca* conveys her ambivalent nature by alluding to her beauty and monstrosity in contradicting fragments. She is described as the only mortal among the Gorgons, though she is like them in appearance with a head "twined about with the scales of dragons" along with "great tusks like swine's, […] brazen hands, and golden wings" (2.4.2). Another trait the sisters share is the ability to "turn" those who look on them "to stone,"

which, along with their fearsome appearance, serves to portray Perseus's quest as dangerous and heroic (2.4.2). Upon reaching the island of the Gorgons, the hero stands over them "as they sle[ep]," and, unable to look on them directly, is "guided [by Athena]" as he "behold[s] the image of [Medusa]" through the reflection of "a brazen shield" (2.4.2). Whereas the allusion is subtle, Perseus's act of stalking and subduing the Gorgon while she sleeps bears resemblance to the process of erotic pursuit, particularly the rape of Thetis.[15] Medusa's decapitation is the second violation she is subjected to by a powerful male, the first being her sexual encounter with Poseidon that leads to the birth of "the winged horse Pegasus and Chrysaor" (2.4.2).[16] As "her head is cut off," the open cavity of her neck becomes a birthing channel from which this offspring emerges, which on a metaphoric level frames the decapitation as an echo of Poseidon's sexual penetration, thus, an establishment of the hero's divinely bestowed power manifest in the act of subjugation that brings forth the god's progeny (2.4.2). Apart from displaying Perseus's power, the decapitation also serves as a punishment that transpires "for [the] sake" of the goddess Athena, whose jealousy is kindled by Medusa's beauty surpassing hers (2.4.3). This detail, which contrasts with the monstrosity attributed to the Gorgons earlier in the book, is consistent with the ambivalence that accompanies the Medusa's appearance in Greek mythology, a circumstance Ovid later accounts for.

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[15] The nymph Thetis could elude capture by changing form while awake, so Peleus resorted to tying her up as she slept, which left her with no choice but to give in to his advances (Pseudo-Apollodorus 3.13.5; Ovid 11.221-290).

[16] While the circumstances around Medusa's union with Poseidon are not mentioned in the *Bibliotheca*, Hesiod's representation of the event as a seduction sets the scene for a forced sexual encounter, a detail readers of the *Bibliotheca* would have been aware of.

Ovid constructs an elaborate account of the feats of Perseus, and, as is his practice, draws from previous versions of the myth to establish background, bolstering omissions and ambiguities with his interpretation of events. In so doing, he combines the fragments of Medusa's tale as they appear in the Greek myths, providing a version of events that identifies her union with Neptune[17]as the reason for the punishment that begins with transformation and culminates in decapitation. Asked to recount how he "remov[ed] the head of the snake-haired Gorgon" at his wedding feast, Perseus tells of his journey to "the home of the Gorgons" and how he looked on her "terrible," sleeping visage through the reflection of his bronze shield to administer the blow that resulted in the birth of "swift-winged Pegasus" who "sprang from his mother's blood […] with his brother Chrysaor" (4.771, 778-9, 779-86). Whereas the latter is not mentioned again, the winged horse is significant in that, as he "spr[ings] from Medusa," he digs the fountain of the Muses with his hooves, a circumstance that, like the "many-headed tune" accounted for by Pindar, serves to establish a connection between the Gorgon and the arts (Ovid 5.256-7; line 9-11).

To explain the dual nature of the Gorgon that emerges from the Greek sources, Ovid has Perseus narrate why "Medusa, alone of her sisters, ha[s] snakes entwined in her hair" (4.791). Once "an exceedingly beautiful maiden, […] her marvellous hair was her crowning glory" until the fateful day Neptune caught sight of her and "raped" her "inside the shrine of Minerva" (4.793-8). Humiliated by the desecration that transpired, the goddess "punish[es] the sin" by

[17] Poseidon in the Greek accounts.

"transform[ing] the Gorgon's beautiful hair into horrible snakes" that "startle" those who look on them, turning them to stone (4.799-803). Ovid's use of the word "rape" to describe Medusa's encounter with Neptune is significant, as it implies his understanding of the Greek connotation of seduction as an act that involves force, elucidating Hesiod's euphemistic portrayal that has her simply "ly[ing] with" the god (4.798; *Theogony* 279). Another element that plays an integral role in his version of the tale is the power of petrification bestowed on Medusa as she undergoes transformation. Its function is already described in the *Bibliotheca*, where Perseus uses her decapitated head in many of his exploits (2.4.3). Once victorious, he passes Medusa's head on to Minerva, who places it on her shield to ward off enemies (Ovid 4.802-3; Apollodorus 2.4.3).

Poetic Re-appropriations of the Medusa Myth

As the classical texts that describe Medusa display a progression in terms of the detail they add to her tale, the later poems that draw from the Gorgon's tale characterise her more complexly than the earlier ones. Most poems that characterise Medusa focus on her monstrosity and the power of her petrifying gaze. For instance, the speaker in Louise Bogan's "Medusa" (1923) is turned to stone after gazing on "the stiff bald eyes" of the decapitated Gorgon's head with "serpents on the forehead" that is "[h]eld up at a window" (line 7-8). Plath ("Medusa" 1962), on the other hand, constructs an autobiographical first-person speaker who employs Medusa's monstrous appearance and deviance to reject the inescapable prevalence of a maternal presence by alluding to the fearsome nature

of the snake-haired Gorgon's gaze with descriptions like "unnerving head", "[g]reen wishes" that "hiss at [...] sins" and an "eely tentacle" that won't relinquish its grasp (line 4 40-41, 42). She ends her poem with the ambiguous phrase, "there is nothing between us," expressing both her rejection of the monster and the unaviodable connection she has with her, this "placenta" that shares her blood (line 43). Perhaps aptly in light of the maternal imagery of this poem, her daughter Frieda Hughes also re-appropriates the Medusa, like her portraying the Gorgon as a deviously inescapable figure ("Medusa" 1960). The repetition of "if you could look away" conveys the overpoweringly hypnotic nature of this monster, whose "vipers" can reach her victims much like Plath's terrifying "eely tentacle" that cannot be shaken off (line 11, 14, 16; line 42).

While primarily the monstrous aspects of Medusa are used in the earlier poetic re-appropriations of her tale, a shift in focus occurs in the later contemporary poetic retellings in that they add details such as sexuality, violation and her connection to artistic expression. For instance, Rita Dove's poem titled "Medusa" (1989) alludes to a sexual experience that the speaker needs to forget by "drop[ping]" the "memory" of the male party (line 12). This implies that the recollection involves an encounter that was painful, even violating. In her poem "The Muse as Medusa" (1971), Sarton expands on this theme of violation, particularly how it leads to self-reflection and expression. Her speaker is faced with the Medusa, and comes to realise that they have a kinship built on shared experience, possibly the infliction of injustice and indignity as she states that "love," even if it is "ruthless," brings "healing" (line 24). This is further implied by the "frozen rage" that she sees in the "face" of the Gorgon that is a mirror of her own "face," an

anger that is kindled by a wound, a "self-enclosed and ravaged place" that must be "explor[ed]" (line 25-27). It is as a result of this moment of connection, the "gift" she "thank[s] Medusa for," that the speaker acquires a means to articulate her own experiences, to "le[ave] [the Gorgon] clothed in thought" (line 28, 8).

Duffy's poem "Medusa" (1999) also foregrounds a rage that connects her speaker to the Gorgon, though the image is less cathartic than Sarton's. It foregrounds the perspective of a woman wronged by an unfaithful lover, which effects her transformation from a beautiful maiden to a jealous, snake-haired monster (line 1-5, 30-32). It is significant that she uses words that convey the idea of deflowering to express the way he has abused her loyalty, posing the questions, "[w]asn't I beautiful?" and, more strikingly, "[w]asn't I fragrant and young?" (line 41-42). If the classical accounts of Medusa are to be considered, the implication is that the speaker's lover, her "Greek god," drawn to the allure of her youthful innocence, took advantage of her and left her to come to terms with the consequences, the transition to a creature that has been stripped of these desirable traits (line 14). It is in her rage kindled by this violation of trust that she closes with the ambiguous words, "[l]ook at me now," which express not only how she has changed, but also poses the threat of the petrification she is now capable of inflicting (line 42). However, the most explicit engagement with the injustices inflicted on the Medusa figure appears in Clampitt's poem titled "Medusa" (1999). Describing how "Poseidon, in flagrant trespass [...] closed with her on Athena's temple floor," the speaker recounts the punishment inflicted on the Gorgon in the aftermath, both in the classical accounts and earlier revisions, establishing a

layered understanding of the experiences of the figure and the significance of her petrifying powers with the metaphor of the "geode" (line 10-11, 55).

May Sarton's Medusa and the Female Authorial Voice

Already in her title, "The Muse as Medusa," Sarton establishes the Gorgon's connection with artistic expression as the central theme of her poetic re-presentation. Though her account does not allude to the birth of Pegasus or the Heliconian abode of the Muses, it develops the idea of fluidity, the opposite of petrification, to express the way that the female first-person speaker is inspired to dynamic self-expression through "look[ing] [Medusa] straight in the cold eye" and realising that it is as if "her [own] face" is gazing back at her (line 2, 24). It is this moment of mirroring, a direct gaze unobstructed by the reflection of a Perseus's shield, that serves to connect the speaker and the Gorgon who harbour a kindred "rage," the result of a wound that has been "ravaged" and superficially "enclosed" (line 25-26). This underlying theme of kinship, a connection that emerges from shared experiences of violation, along with the means for self-expression that stems from the "frozen rage" these experiences evoke, is reminiscent of Enterline's characterisation of Medusa as an "avenging" presence in classical myth (76; line 25). Confronted by her unflinching gaze, Sarton's female first-person speaker sees in the Medusa an agency that is a transformation of the violation imposed on her, one that is effected by exploring her woundedness to bring "healing" (line 23). This Medusa has the ability to reverse the power of petrification Minerva bestowed on her as punishment, and creates a

"fluid […] world of feeling" where "thoughts," can "feed and rove," a dynamic means of expression she passes on to the speaker (line 20-23).

The poem opens by setting the scene for the female speaker's encounter with Medusa, specifying that it takes place when they are "alone" to emphasise the intimacy of what will transpire (line 1). She "look[s]" the Gorgon "straight in the cold eye" and is "not punished" with petrification, emulating Cixous's female speaker who "look[s] at the Medusa straight on" and *truly* "see[s] her" (367) in her life-giving, dynamic capacity instead of in the cautionary light cast by the "legends" she has been "told" (line 2-4). Approaching "naked as any little fish / Prepared to be hooked, gutted [and] caught" (line 5-6), she risks the danger of what Cixous describes as a "terrifying myt[h]" men tell women, that of "the Medusa" who is "deadly" and monstrous (367). The way in which she approaches this Medusa is particularly striking. Unlike the hero Perseus, who "armed to the teeth" (Alban 2) stalks her while she sleeps, Sarton's speaker, naked and vulnerable as a "fish," assumes the identity of prey (line 5). Her approach differs from Plath's speaker in "On the Difficulty of Conjuring Up a Dryad," who attempts to assume the identity of the male hunter in pursuit of a poetic subject. Instead, she appropriates the classical language of erotic pursuit to express her connection with the female figure, and makes it clear that her representation of the Medusa will not follow the "male rhetoric of vocal animation" associated with the hunter (Enterline 79). Consequently, when she "s[ees]" Medusa, she is "not punished" with petrification as are those who turn the exploitative gaze of a pursuer on her (line 3). Instead, she is regenerated, "clothed in thought," and "allowed" to "swim [her] way" though the Gorgon "ha[s] power marshaled at

[her] side" (line 7-8, 9-12). This renewal manifests in "escap[ing]" to "many a magic reef" and "explor[ing] many a dangerous sea," the implication being that it leads to discovery (line 13-14).

From the fifth stanza, there is a shift in tone, as the speaker breaks from the "image" of the "fish" to speak about the "fluid mystery," the "silence" of the Medusa which is "[her] ocean," the space she is free to explore (line 15-16,17-18). She juxtaposes the idea of "lack of motion," what petrification brings into effect, with the movement of a watery world that "teems with life" to express the way in which the Gorgon subverts the violations imposed on her – a process of that leaves her silent and motionless – to effect a transformation of a different nature (line 17-20). As she meets the Gorgon's gaze, the unflinching visage that testifies to the "ravaged place" that provoked the shutting off of "feeling," she comes to the realization that "nothing really froze," and that the "world" behind that stony reticence remains "fluid" (line 17, 20, 21, 27). The Medusa of classical myth is violated and silent, transformed into a monster with a petrifying gaze and decapitated to serve the purposes of Perseus and Minerva. Yet, from the open cavity of her neck flows the winged horse Pegasus, and by extension, the fountain of the Muses. Likewise, Sarton's Medusa, "silen[t]" and "ravaged," brings forth a "fluid world" where "thoughts […] feed and rove," a breeding place for artistic expression (line 17, 21-22, 27).

The moment when the speaker looks her "straight in the cold eye," she is bestowed with a "gift," a dynamic means of expression that stems from a "ruthless love," the Gorgon's ferocious withdrawal of the petrifying power

imposed on her (line 2, 24, 28). Fluidity, the medium Medusa brings forth to reverse petrification, is described as "healing," a process her "ruthless love" sets in motion (line 23-24). As the speaker faces her and sees her own reflection staring back at her, she thus encounters a "frozen rage" that must be "explored," an aspect of herself mirrored in the Gorgon's gaze (line 25-26). The "secret, self-enclosed and ravaged place" she alludes to implies that this "rage" they share stems from a violation, a "rape" if the classical tradition is to be believed, that has been suppressed, "frozen" as it were, in an attempt to effect "healing" (line 23, 26, 27; Enterline 76). Nonetheless, the Medusa's vengeance against this violation that momentarily immobilizes her is an exploration of her woundedness. In so doing, she creates a "fluid world of feeling" that culminates in a dynamic self-expression, which is the "gift" she passes on to the speaker (line 21, 28). While the decapitated Gorgon of classical myth is associated with the Muses through her offspring, the winged horse Pegasus, Sarton's Medusa *becomes* the Muse, a source of inspiration that the female first-person speaker can not only draw from, but also identify with.

Carol Anne Duffy's Vengeful Medusa

Duffy's poetic re-appropriation of the Medusa figure, like Sarton's, is also built on a narrative of violation and rage. However, already by the third line, it is apparent that her female first-person speaker's connection with the Gorgon surpasses kinship in that her jealous rage *transforms* her into the personification of the snake-haired creature (line 1-5). Throughout, images of deflowering and

decay are employed to demonstrate her transition from "beautiful," "fragrant and young" to "terrif[ying]" (line 12, 40-41). This implies that her youthful naiveté has been exploited and trampled on by a husband who has left her spent and stripped of that allure, used goods as it were. Whereas this imagery of a ripe beauty that can be plucked only to wilt after use feeds into the patriarchal fixation on the preservation of virginity and the notion that its loss detracts from a woman's allure, it builds on classical perceptions of female sexuality from the lyric poetry of Sappho to the so-called 'loves' of the Olympian gods. Further, this idea of stripping away conveys the speaker's sense of violation as her trust is betrayed, graphically enacted by the physical transformation that her body progressively undergoes as the narrative of the poem unfolds. As this process draws to a close and she "star[es] in the mirror" where "[l]ove gone bad show[s] [her] a Gorgon," the speaker, as Gilian Alban (2) asserts, fully "access[es]" the mythical monster's "dread power" by channeling the rage that her husband's infidelity evokes to direct her petrifying gaze at him (line 30-32). Through her transformation, she is no longer merely a victim of his exploitation, but a powerful, avenging force that asserts her right to retribution.

The first three stanzas set the scene for the speaker's transformation and the circumstances behind it. It begins with "suspicion, [...] doubt" and "jealousy" being kindled in her "mind" as her husband's infidelity grows increasingly apparent, which "turn[s] the hair on [her] head to filthy snakes" (line 1-3). Already with the introduction of the word "filthy," ideas of contamination and decay are introduced to express the way in which she finds herself changed, while the fact that it is her "hair" that is transformed implies that her feminine allure is

affected by his mistreatment (line 3). However, the root of this physical transition, as implied by the emotions in the opening line, stems from the psychological damage of his abandonment, the knowledge that he will "betray" her and "stray from home" (line 15, 16). It is as the "thoughts [...] hiss and [spit] on her scalp" that the "snakes" sprout from her hair (line 3-5). The significance of "snakes" here go beyond the attribute traditionally ascribed to the Gorgon in that it evokes the tale of Eden, where the serpent is a creature associated with deception and betrayal (line 3). This narrative of loss of innocence evokes the speaker's experience at the hands of a man who betrayed her trust, a circumstance that leads to the introduction of disintegration and decay into her world as her "bride's breath" begins to "sou[r] and st[ink]" (line 6). Yet, the transformation takes on a different nature as it progresses, with "grey bags" for "lungs," a "foul mout[h]," "yellow fang[s]" and "bullet tears" implying her embodiment of characteristics that surpass the mythical powers of the Gorgon (line 7-9). With these dragon-like qualities, she transcends the limitations placed on her classical counterpart, foreshadowing the retribution she will mete out for the wrongs inflicted on her. She begins to direct her rage at its source, the "perfect man" who "will betray" her as he has done in the past, addressing him with the ominous words "be terrified" to express the impending threat of petrification (line 12-16).

Whereas the imagery of decay in the opening stanzas stems from the speaker's rage at her husband's "betray[al]," there is also an underlying element of the classical seduction motif at play (line 15). In the sixth line, the act of deflowering is implied in that the speaker's state of maidenhood, her identity as a "brid[e]," is tarnished (line 6). Following the pattern in these tales, Duffy's maiden speaker

becomes a monster after her virtue is compromised, and is bestowed with a petrifying power that increases with her rage. First, she finds herself in a woodland setting, a space Susan Deacy describes as brimming with erotic possibilities where virgins pluck[...] [...] flower[s]" and are "deflower[ed]," undergoing the change from "girls" to women (399). Similarly changed, the speaker directs her gaze at a "buzzing bee" which immediately becomes a "pebble" and a "singing bird" which is reduced to a "dusty gravel" (line 18-19, 21-22). She then moves to a farmyard, where her petrifying powers grow stronger and her descriptions more banal to indicate her estrangement from the innocence of her virginal state. Accordingly, the "ginger cat" is transformed to a "housebrick" that falls into a "bowl of milk," while the "snuffling pig" becomes a "boulder" that "roll[s]/ in a heap of shit" (line 24-25, 27-29). The final shift in scenery brings her into the house, where she "stare[s]" at herself "in the mirror" and is faced with the full extent of her transformation (line 30). Much like the regression of the scenery from meadow to excrement, her once "beautiful" face becomes testament to "love gone bad" in the hideous features of "a Gorgon" (line 31, 40). However, as established previously, the dragon-like traits that accompany this transformation indicate her transcendance of the limitations placed on the classical Medusa in that she gives utterance to her rage, spewing "fire" as she takes ownership of her new form and prepares to face her husband (line 34-35).

As the transformed speaker is approached by the man who violated her trust, a power struggle ensues. In comparing her husband to Perseus with his "shield for a heart" and "sword for a tongue," she identifies him as an opponent intent on destroying her (line 37-38). The "shield," which in classical accounts enables the

hero to decapitate the Gorgon without looking directly at her, is associated with his "heart" to imply his detachment (line 37). Much like Perseus towards Medusa, he is focused on her utility rather than her wellbeing, discarding her once he has obtained what he wanted from her. With his "tongue" that serves as a "sword," he attempts to diminish her with words, flaunting his infidelities to humiliate her (line 38-39). In response, she expresses the way in which he exploited her by building on the deflowering metaphor she introduced to describe her transformation. Posing the questions, "[w]asn't I beautiful," and more pertinently, "[w]asn't I fragrant and young," she conveys the idea that she was plucked by him when she was in her prime (line 40, 41). This imagery is reminiscent of Greek lyric representations of maidenhood like Sappho's fragment titled "Girlhood," which compares a virgin to "the wild flower" (line 1). In her rendition, this flower is trampled under "the shepherd's foot" to "leav[e] [a] petalled print," which implies that the maiden's encounter with a man entails a process of ravishment that leaves her altered beyond recognition (line 1-10). Likewise, Sarton's speaker is stripped of her allure by a husband who exploits her only to replace her with other "girls" yet unplucked (line 39). While this leaves her with a "love gone bad" that renders her a "Gorgon" and a "dragon," she transcends this circumstance by directing a retributive gaze at him (line 31-33). With the closing words, "[l]ook at me now," she takes ownership of her transformation, the unraveling of her innocence and youthful allure at the hands of his mistreatment, by drawing from her rage at this injustice (line 42). In so doing, she surpasses the rejection that rendered her 'used goods,' asserting her

right to be seen and her power to mete out vengeance on the man that made her invisible.

Amy Clampitt's Sympathetic Medusa

While both Sarton's and Duffy's poetic representations of the Medusa develop the theme of violation, it is Clampitt's five stanza poem that provides the most overt description of sexual assault. Developing a compendium of associations that accompany the Gorgon – ranging from natural imagery representing ripeness and fertility, to the psychoanalytic implications of petrification conveyed through geological and biological references – Clampitt provides a nuanced portrayal of the significance of Medusa's tale in all its dimensions. The narrating speaker establishes the circumstances of her subject's encounter with Poseidon and the subsequent transformation. She then introduces a metatextual critique of this condemnation by outlining the Puritan revisions of the Gorgon, the "female ogre" vilified for the crimes of another (line 23). In response, she reiterates Medusa's innocence, contradicting the monstrosity and malevolence attributed to her by situating her in the realm of nature as a powerful entity rather than a mutant. In a similar manner, petrification – which is mythologised as the deadly power wielded by her gaze – is rewritten in the final stanza with the image of the "geode" (line 55). With crystals "[…]clench[ed]" inward "to the core" and its hard exterior the "fearful armories" that shield what is precious within, the process of turning to stone serves as a metaphor for preservation, a natural response to violation as opposed to a malevolent act of vengeance (line 54-55). As

mentioned previously, the poem in its entirety is long, and contains a compendium of complex references applied to Medusa's tale, which require detailed analysis. For this reason, the following close reading only traces the themes of sexual violence and transformation developed in the first, second and fifth stanzas, to unpack the way in which Clampitt revises the Gorgon's tale to portray her as a sympathetic figure.

The first two stanzas introduce the dual nature of the Medusa, her beauty and monstrosity, detailing the significance of her transformation from the former to the latter by juxtaposing images that evoke both horror and allure. The characterisation begins with an allusion to Plath's monstrous representation of the Gorgon that likens her snake hair to "tentacles" to portray her gaze as "unnerving" and unflinching, a visage that "stands every fibril of the mind on end" (Clampitt line 1-2, Plath line 4, 42). Further, the reflective capacity of her "brazen" countenance is introduced with the expression "lust looked at backwards," the implication being that the onlooker's objectifying gaze is turned back onto himself (line 3). The apotrepic function of the Medusa-gaze, which lies in this mirroring, an "antique scare tactic" to ward off the lust of would-be suitors, is either "self-protection" or "a libel" on the female sex, a rejection of what is considered appropriately feminine (line 4-5).

The metaphor of the "periodic blossom" that "hangs its ungathered garland from the horned clockwork of the moon" that follows introduces the idea of fertility, particularly a woman's menstrual cycle and, by extension, the allure that accompanies her potential for producing offspring (line 5-7). In this light, the idea

of a "scare tactic" foreshadows the description Medusa's rape to follow (4).The description of the "ungathered garland" builds on this narrative, conveying the temptation that would be awakened in the male onlooker to pluck the blossoms, an act of deflowering, as it were (line 6). In the case of Medusa, then, feminine allure leads to violation, a "flagrant trespass" inflicted by "Poseidon […] on Athena's temple floor" which resulted not only in her physical assault, but also in a stripping away of her "beauty" as punishment (line 9-11). The description of "tide-rip torrents in the blood" that the second stanza opens with implies the warm-blooded lust of the sea god Poseidon, who as a virile force of nature "not to be denied," overpowers Medusa (line 12, 13). However, Athena "has no time" to consider the circumstances surrounding the defilement of her temple (line 15-16). Her "[v]irginal revenge" for the act she vilifies manifests in stripping Medusa of her "beauty" – the perceived vice she blames for the desecration (line 10, 17). Ultimately, then, it is "the woman" the god raped "who pa[ys]" as her beautiful "tresses" are transformed to "water-snake-like writhe," the appeal of "long lashes" to a "stare" that petrifies (line 12-13, 19-21).

Perhaps most cruel is the way in which this transformation mirrors her experiences – her striking beauty transmuted to an equally striking monstrosity, and her violation to an involuntary repetition of the act of objectification, the process of making those who gaze on her into objects. The process of petrification, described as the "hard[ing] [of] the psyche's soft parts to rock," implies a penetration violating as the one inflicted on Medusa, a piercing gaze that cuts into what is most vulnerable, transforming the onlooker to stone (line 22). This imagery registers the violence of the trauma she endured, implying not only

the way she uses petrification as a defence mechanism, but also the way that she encloses what is most susceptible to harm in herself with a hard exterior, an image that is later developed through the metaphor of the geode.

Building on the subject matter of the preceding stanzas, the closing stanza rejects the condemnations of the Gorgon that emerge in the classical and religious representations of her tale. Blamed for her beauty, a quality that made her seductive, and her monstrosity, a testament to her culpability, she is vilified as a malevolent temptress. However, the speaker redefines Medusa as "the cold mother of us all," associating her subject with her those she addresses to undermine the perception of the Gorgon as a monstrous other (line 45-46). Resuming the theme of psychoanalysis, she casts her as representative of dualities, the "multiplicities of cause" that intertwine "hurt" with "its effect," life with fossilization (line 52, 53). As the classical Medusa gives birth in the process of decapitation, brings forth the fountain of the Muses while her severed head retains the power of petrification, Clampitt's figure has "viscid barbs that turn the blood to coral" imbedded in the "tissue of desire," a "heartbeat" reduced to "silicates" (line 49-51). In this juxtaposition of biological and geological images, then, the Gorgon's hybridity is identified not as an indication of evil as the Puritans would have it, but as a symptom of the violence inflicted on her, which robs her of life while preserving her legacy for those who would draw from its protective power. As the "surgeon" who attempts to "unthread" what is at the core of the "geode," the protective cavity created by her petrifying power, the speaker attempts to expose the vulnerability enclosed within (line 51-52, 55). Uncovering the unjust condemnation of Medusa, who was victimised in life and literary

tradition, she implements the image of crystals clenched in the "airless petrification towards the core" of the stone exterior to convey the restriction that accompanies violation (line 53-54). Be it suppression to prevent a reliving of the trauma or the containment of vulnerability within a protective shield, Clampitt portrays petrification as an act of preservation rather than a malevolent weapon.

Conclusion

Having considered the progression in poetic re-presentations of Medusa from the modern and early contemporary poems that allude to her monstrosity and petrifying gaze to the later contemporary retellings that add details such as sexuality, violation and her association with the arts to these attributes, I close with my own portrayal of the myth which conceptualises her in a setting that reflects the milieu I inhabit. Drawing from the frequency of sexual violence in South Africa, I envision Medusa as a statistic, "one in three," much as she appears in the amorous annals of classical myth, "another woman seen and snatched / without asking" by a man who realised he could (line 12-13). Assaulted and left for dead, she succumbs to rigor mortis, "pale like cracked marble," a stiffness mirrored in society's reception of the news (line 5-6). The "clinical captions of newspaper columns" that "expertly hol[d] horror at arm's length" express the desensitisation that accompanies the prevalence of violence (line 9-10). The power of Medusa's "gaze" in such a context, as yet another victim in a list that grows by the hour, is a petrification similar to that of her classical counterpart (line 14). As "[w]e look on through reporters' cameras," detached from the

situation till it directly involves us, the power of her gaze reaches beyond the Medusa of "legend" in that even an indirect glance at her reflected image "turn[s] […] to stone," hardens "hearts" with a familiarity that makes "horror" merely another fixture in the background (line 10, 19, 20).

CHAPTER 4

"The Hard Word Rape":

The Unveiling of Violence and Exploitation in Poetic Revisions of Leda's Tale

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Introduction

Few classical seduction scenes are as enigmatic as the tale of Leda's encounter with Zeus in swan form. Apart from her beauty, her brief meeting with the god and the offspring that are its result, she enjoys little characterisation in classical myth. Ultimately, the question that stands out in the allusions to her, gleaned from the Homeric Hymns to Ovid, is that of sexual agency which raises the still pertinent question of consent. Though the classical sources portray the sexual encounter ambiguously by obscuring her response to the god's attentions, the poems that draw from them employ it to suit varied interpretations. A narrative of rape that emphasises the swan's violent act of ravishment and impregnation serves the poetic accounts of male writers such as W. B. Yeats ("Leda and the Swan" 1923) and D. H. Lawrence ("Leda" 1929) well. Conversely, that of a gentle union that places emphasis on the serene landscape is employed by H.D. ("Leda" 1921), whereas Duffy ("Leda" 2007) portrays a consensual seduction, foregrounding the perspective of a woman who actively seeks out the swan's attentions to expose the god's exploitation of her expectations. However, some

woman writers also repurpose the narrative of rape as a means to expose the violation inflicted on the female victim.

In her poem "Leda, No Swan" (1996), for instance, Brown reveals the attitude of victim-blaming prevalent in classical thought and in her own society. The perception that the woman who puts herself in harm's way is culpable is explicated by Lefkowitz's assertion that the female figures from Greek myth who leave their "homes," a space where they enjoy protection from fathers and husbands, invite "abduct[tion] or seduc[tion]" by a male god (54, 56). Similarly, Brown's Leda unveils the callous responses of a society that denies the validity and trauma of the experiences of rape victims. In Kumin's "Pantoum, with Swan" (2002), on the other hand, the Leda figure takes the morning-after pill following her assault to prevent the pregnancy that would have produced offspring that played a role in the Trojan War. Consequently, the male tradition of classical myth with its plethora of heroes conceived by rape is "forestalled," while Kumin's speaker gives voice to her experiences as a female figure subjected to this narrative trope, thus effecting a metapoetic commentary that responds to the damage associated with it (line 16). Building on the varying degrees of violation that comprise the subject matter of the other poems, my poem "Leda" reads in the classical tale an echo of the injustices women are subjected to at the hands of men in her own society, describing the disillusionment that accompanies repeated experience of these inequalities. In short, based on the various inflections of consent, sexual coercion and sexual violence that emerge with classical and modern portrayals of Leda, this chapter aims to unpack what Brown describes as "the hard word rape," a word difficult to utter for the act it describes and the

responses it evokes (line 9). It sets out to unveil the trauma that accompany the often aestheticized descriptions of the act, and the trepidation with which women who experience, and therefore know sexual violence, approach tales such as Leda's.

According to Marina Warner, "many instances of rape and insemination result in the founding of nations" or events of national importance (11). This is achieved, Lefkowitz argues, through the remarkable offspring that are the "consequenc[e] of the[se] unions," who "usually bring honour to [their] families" (56). In the tale of Leda's rape by Zeus, as O'Gorman observes, this advancement of "Greek history" is effected by ties to the Trojan War (in Zayko and Leonard195). The renowned offspring born of the assault are inextricably linked to the workings of the war, with Helen, famed for her beauty, considered its "cause," and Castor and Pollux, heralded in the Homeric hymns as sons of Zeus, commended for their bravery in combat (O'Gorman in Zayko and Leonard195).Though Troy is a site of historical significance, its legendary status as the setting for many major narrative threads of the classical tradition serves to associate it with the creation of literature on a metaphoric level. This relationship between violence and artistic expression is already evident in the Medusa myth, discussed in the previous chapter. The "act[s] of […] dehumanization" inflicted on her, the rape that results in pregnancy and the decapitation that effects the birth of the winged horse Pegasus are manifestations of "extreme violence," as noted by Cavarero, constituting acts that "deform" the female subject, yet bring forth the fountain of the Muses (16). Likewise, in Leda's tale, violence produces offspring that generate artistic

inspiration, the epic form that is built on "repeated violations against the female body" (Enterline 78).

Enterline identifies in these tales what she describes as "the male rhetoric of vocal animation" that manifests in "the origins of poetry in rape and the power of the would-be rapist's voice" (79). Taking this into consideration, the weight placed on male expression stemming from the victimization of the female body is already apparent in the poetic acumen bestowed on divine rapists for their seduction speeches in texts like Ovid's *Metamorphoses*. Further, it is on the act of rape, or its attempt, that the backbone of many artistic endeavours in these accounts rest, an example being Pan's employment of the reeds that are his transformed victim to create the musical instrument that bears his name (Ovid 1.711-12; Bloch 7). In Yeats's poem "Leda and the Swan" in particular, this correlation between sexual violence and poetic generation is foregrounded. The speaker begins by stating that "[a] shudder in the loins," the instance of sexual penetration, "engenders […] / [t]he broken wall, the burning roof and tower / [a]nd Agamemnon dead," identifying the events of the Trojan War as a direct result of the sexual assault (line 9, 10, 11). He then poses the question of whether Leda "put on knowledge with [her assailant's] power" before his "indifferent beak could let her drop," the implication being that his impregnation conceives something beyond the semi-divine offspring it culminates in (line 14-15). Cranny-Francis expands on this in her engagement with the patriarchal notion that the act of writing involves the wielding of the "bod[y]" as an "instrument[…] of power" by unpacking Friedman's metaphor of the "instrumental penis/phallus" as a penetrating pen that "conceives thought" (Cranny-Francis 37; Friedman in Cranny-Francis 35). As

Ovid achieved with the tale of Syrinx, where the nymph becomes an accessory to her pursuer's artistry, Yeats renders his Leda a receptacle into which Zeus pours his "knowledge" (in both of its connotations), to metaphorically account for his male speaker's process of poetic creation (line 14).

While rhetoric built on the sexual subjugation of women's bodies is used as a means to articulate the process of male artistic creation, the texts that this process engenders contain a similar metaphor, namely that of a male genealogy, which manifests in the perpetuation of a heroic legacy. This heroic legacy, like the creative inspiration that stems from "repeated violations against the female body," is passed on through an economy of violence (Enterline 78). It often originates, as any superficial glance at the heroes listed as participants of an epic battle would reveal, in the rape of a mortal woman by a male god. As the process is set in motion by an act of violence, it is continued by acts of violence, the perpetuation of a cycle of warfare and rape as the sons born as a result embark on heroic quests to honour their divine parentage. In the Homeric Hymn that alludes to the tale of Leda, for instance, it is mentioned that the maiden gives birth to the *Dioskouroi* (διοσκουροι), literally translated as 'sons of the god,' after she was visited by the "dark-clouded son of Kronos," Zeus, who "bent her to his will" (17 *To the Dioskuroi,* line 3-4). In both Homeric Hymns devoted to these warriors, they are heralded as "riders upon swift horses," a title also attributed to them as famed warriors in the *Iliad* (17 line 5; 33 line 17).

Since this perpetuation of a heroic legacy begins with an act of subjugation, the man's act of taking the woman's body as property for his sexual gratification and

the continuation of his lineage, the premise of sexuality, particularly the reading of the male role as active and the female as passive, is relevant. In this light, Freud's essay titled "Femininity," where he argues that "there is only one libido," one which by his reasoning favours the male member, the phallus, comes to mind (131). He advances the argument of male sexuality as active and penetrative with the statement that "the aim of biology has been entrusted to the aggressiveness of men and has been made to some extent independent of women's consent" (131) Irigaray responds to his conception of the phallocentric "libido['s] […] struggle for property" by stating that this drive is satiated by a "warfare" of instincts (*Speculum* 94). She states that "[w]omen may possibly be the occasion of [this] war, or its booty, or its 'object' – though not in a simple way, since what is principally at stake in war is the value of the penis for which woman can stand as the fetish guarantee – but they will be able to take no active part in it" (Irigaray *Speculum* 94). From her critique, where she reveals that the woman is the object of the man's quest for sexual property, the premise for the Trojan War can also be inferred on a metaphoric level. A war started because of a man's loss of a desirable woman, Helen, herself the offspring of Leda's rape by Zeus, it is both a display of male heroism and a quest for sexual property, which is the reward of male bravery.

Having established the way in which the male-centred rhetoric of creative inspiration and the phallocentric genealogy that stems from it are based on acts of violence, the female process of creation, in response, is dynamic rather than destructive. Though it addresses the trauma inflicted by violence against the female body, "a body" Cavarero identifies as "vulnerable" and an entity that

"remains vulnerable as long as she lives, exposed at any instant to *vulnus* [wounding]" it remains a process of reinvention and healing (Cavarero 30). Pumela Dineo Gqola observes the effects of a society where "women's bodies are seen as accessible for consumption — touching, raping, kidnapping, commenting on, grabbing, twisting, beating, burning, maiming — and control" to express the way in which women are consistently exploited and victimized by men ("Cult of Femininity" 120). Accordingly, she states that "experiences lived, shared and related" by women testify to "how widespread — endemic — gender based violence is," asserting that this violence can be "undo[ne] […] only by unmasking the collective denial" on the part of society with regard to "who is abusing and raping" ("Cult of Femininity" Gqola 118).

One manner of "unmasking" this widespread violation is drawing from a literary tradition riddled with sexual violence as the societies we live in, namely the classical tradition. Byrne theorises about the nature of myth by responding to Patrick Murphy's definition of myths, defining them "as fictional narratives that exert a shaping influence on society," and "founding narratives […] drawn from strongly patriarchal societies" that "naturally reflect male-centred views of the world and human interaction" (2). Building on this idea, she states that "[f]eminist revision" of these myths "takes its impetus from the fact that myth tends to privilege men and what are seen as 'masculine' values, such as aggression, rationality and physical resilience," rewriting the narratives to favour a female perspective (3). Particularly noteworthy in the poems discussed in this chapter is the way in which the male poets that draw from the tale of Leda retain these male-centred elements, emphasising the virile power of Zeus and the helplessness of

Leda, whereas the woman poets reinvent the classical tale to foreground Leda's experience of the encounter.

Classical Representation of Leda

As a result of the progeny that play an integral role in Greek mythology, Leda's encounter with the god Zeus is renowned. She is deemed beautiful, described as "stately" and "neat ankled" in the Homeric hymns, and the circumstances surrounding her union with the god are ambiguous as is characteristic of classical 'seductions' (33 *To the Dioskouroi* line 1). Particularly, it is the brevity of the written classical references to her that stands out, the characterisation attributed to her primarily focused on the moments of her unions with "the dark-clouded son of Kronos" and her husband Tyndarius, and the feats of their remarkable offspring (17 *To the Dioskouroi* line 3). In short, it is purported that Zeus, in the form of a swan, impregnated her by pretending to take refuge in her arms as he was "fleeing the pursuit of an eagle" (Euripides 19-21). An author assuming the name Apollodorus adds that, "on the same night," her husband "Tyndarius cohabited with her" (3.10.6). These unions resulted in her giving birth to two sets of twins, Polydeukes (Polydeuces) and Helene (Helen), the offspring of Zeus, along with Kastor (Castor) and Klytemnestra (Clytemnestra), the offspring of Tyndarius (Hyginus *Fabulae* 77, 80; Pseudo-Apollodorus 3.10.6). Although Leda's offspring are infamous for their connection to the narrative of the Trojan War, Castor and Polydeuces for their bravery in battle, Clytemnestra for murdering the king Agammemnon upon his return, and Helen as the reason for its beginning,

their ties to their mother remain a detail of great importance within the classical tradition.

The enigma surrounding tales of seduction is particularly relevant to Leda's tale, with the words used to describe her union with Zeus ranging from benign to overtly violent. The earliest written allusions appear in the Homeric Hymns addressed *To the Dioskouroi*, a name given to the warriors Castor and Pollux [18] to indicate that they are sons of Zeus. In the term 'dioskouroi' (διοσκουροι [19]), then, Leda's relationship to the god is also implied. However, already in the descriptions of the two hymns, the ambivalent nature of her union with him is conveyed. In hymn 17, for instance, it is made explicit that Castor and Pollux are the product of "the dark-clouded Son of Kronos privily ben[ding]" the maiden "to his will" (17 *To the Dioskouroi* line 3-4). This language, as observed by Reeder, is reminiscent of the metaphorics of marriage, often employed interchangeably with 'seduction,' which describes the "marriageable maide[n]" as an "untamed animal" with the potential to "be domesticated" through sexual subjugation to a man (300). The violence that accompanies this imagery is foregrounded in the dominance of the male party who asserts his "will" over that of the female on the receiving end (17 *To the Dioskouroi* line 3-4). The concept of "bending" to "his will" indicates coercion, an act of relentlessly pursuing until she gives in to the advances (17 *To the Dioskouroi* line 3-4). In Hymn 33, on the other hand, the language describing Leda's encounter with Zeus is considerably less forceful. It

[18] Whereas some accounts identify Helen and Pollux as the offspring of Zeus, others, such as the Homeric Hymns, identify both warriors as divine.
[19] The prefix *dio,* shortened version of the genitive *diou*, can be translated as 'son of,' and *kurios* as 'lord,' 'master,' or even 'god.'

recounts that Castor and Pollux were conceived from the instance their mother "had lain with the dark-clouded Son of Kronos," an expression that implies mutual consent (33 *To the Dioskouroi* 2).

The classical author that succeeds the writer of the Homeric Hymns, Isocrates, describes the experiences of Leda in a manner similarly benign to Hymn 33, stating that Zeus took on the "guise of a swan" when he "espoused Leda" (10.59). He continues with a defence of the nature of Zeus, asserting that the god does not "pursue beauty in women" by subjecting them to "violence," but rather employs "artifice" to gently seduce them (10.59). This erasure of the violent undertones of the classical portrayal of seduction is reminiscent of the reasoning of the classicist Lefkowitz, who insist on describing the encounters as "abductions or seductions" on the premise that the Olympian gods do not inflict violence on mortal women (54). Euripides appears to share this sentiment, as his Helen euphemistically describes her mother's encounter with Zeus as "deceptive," in so doing implying that force was not necessary (Euripides 1.20-23). The genealogy in the *Argonautica* portrays Leda in an unprecedented manner in that she is described as actively supporting her divine lover. In sending her sons Castor and Pollux to join the expedition of the hero Jason, she acts in a manner "worthy of the bride of Zeus" (Rhodius, *Argonautica* 1.146). This implies that she honours her union with the god by advancing his cause through the heroic offspring that are its result.

As in most of the Greek sources, the works of the Roman poet Ovid describe Leda's experience with the god without overt reference to sexual violence. His *Amores*, for instance, indicates that Leda was "seduced by the white feathers/ of a

lecherous god" (10.3-4). However, in his *Metamorphoses*, the tale is placed alongside other seduction scenes on the tapestry of Arachne. In chapter 1, the way in which she employs her tapestry as a communication device to criticise the exploitative designs of the Olympian gods was established to indicate that her line of reasoning portrays the gods as rapists. Warner also reads the dissenting artist's work as depicting "the rapes of the Olympians" (95). Advancing this argument, Ovid employs *ekphrasis* to describe "Leda, meekly reclining under the wings of the swan," almost as if the scene on the tapestry is transpiring before him (6.109). In this wording, as in Arachne's inclusion of the tale on her tapestry, there is a hint of the sexual force described in the seventeenth Homeric Hymn *To the Diouskouroi* in that the idea of the swan's "wings" spanning over a "meekly" submissive maiden is reminiscent of the god "bend[ing] her to his will" (Ovid 6.109; 17 *To the Dioskouroi* line 3-4).

Poetic Retellings of Leda's Tale

As with the classical representations of Leda, the poetry that draws from her tale portrays her union with Zeus in different ways. Particularly noteworthy is the way in which male poets such as Lawrence and Yeats perpetuate the erotic pursuit narrative that foregrounds Zeus as a violent impregnating force, Leda as a vulnerable, ravaged victim.[20] Yeats, for instance, conveys the idea of Zeus as an

[20] Whereas the poetic accounts of Rainer María Rilke ("Leda" 1908) and Robert Graves ("Leda" 1959) foreground the violent rape of Leda by Zeus in a similar manner, only the poems of Yeats and Lawrence will be unpacked for the sake of brevity.

overpowering force with the "sudden blow" of "great wings beating" and the "bill" that captures its victim in its grasp, "let[ing] her drop" once she has been "mastered by the brute blood of the air," the impregnation complete (line 1, 3,13-15). On the other hand, Leda is described as a "staggering girl" whose "helpless breast" is held against that of her rapist, her "terrified vague fingers" powerless to keep him at bay (line 2, 4, 5). Lawrence, on the other hand, describes the swan as "a hiss of wings," and continues to convey his power with an extended metaphor evoking the image of a stormy water, the "sea-touch tip of a beak" and "treading of wet, webbed, wave-working feet" (line 4-6). In contrast, Leda, on the receiving end of this force of nature, is merely alluded to as a "marsh-soft belly" (line 7). Whereas a superficial reading of these poems renders them merely a retelling of the Leda tale, a sexual assault where Zeus "bend[s]" the maiden "to his will," there is, as in their classical counterparts, a metapoetic element at play in the narrative of rape as established previously concerning Yeats's "Leda and the Swan" (17 *To the Dioskouroi* line 3). The idea of artistic generation that these male-centred poems develop is, to use the words of Shadi Neimneh, Nisreen Sawwa and Marwan Obeidat, highly "romanticised" and "aestheticised" in that they emphasise "the glory of the beautiful god-swan" and the union (32).

Another modernist poet who portrays Leda's union with Zeus in an idealised manner is H.D. ("Leda" 1921). Her poetic account, like those of Lawrence and Yeats, foregrounds aspects of the landscape, though her setting is considerably more serene. The meter implies a course of events that transpires gradually in the place "where the slow river/ meets the tide," which stands in stark contrast to the violent, rapid movement expressed in the poetic accounts of the male poets, the

"webbed, wave working feet" and "sudden blow" of "great wings" that convey an unforeseen attack (H. D. "Leda" line 1, 2; Lawrence "Leda" line 6; Yeats "Leda and the Swan" line 1). With expressions like "caressed," "kingly kiss," "soft fluttering" and "warm quivering," then, she foregrounds the perspective of a Leda gently wooed by her divine lover (line 12, 24, 31, 33). True to the imagist style that H.D. is known for, her poem "Leda," like "Pursuit" (1916) discussed in Chapter 2, foregrounds aspects of the landscape to create a central image. In the latter, the speaker evokes the Daphne myth, the narrative of sexual violence, through the image of woodland trampled underfoot and bruised by a male pursuer as he hunts down his fleeing quarry.

In "Leda," an image is also drawn from the natural surroundings, in this case that of a swan brushing over a day lily with "soft fluttering" to represent the union of Zeus and Leda as a sensual seduction (line 31). However, here there is no image of violence, no bruising. Instead, there is the "caress" of "purple down" on "soft breast," a swan "drifting" on the "slow […] tide," as opposed to the chase in "Pursuit," the "heel" that "cut[s] deep" to bruise the landscape, "press" the "wild hyacinth […] deep purple" (*Leda* line 5-6, 12, 16-17, 19; *Pursuit* line 5, 12-15).While there are considerable differences in H.D.'s representations of the respective tales, it is significant that each poetic account foregrounds the experience of its female figure. To account for the difference, it is important to consider the fact that the tale of Daphne represents erotic pursuit in its most basic form, whereas Leda's is a seduction where no explicit chase takes place. Though the hunting metaphors employed to describe Apollo's pursuit of Daphne compare him to predatory creatures like the hound, it is significant that Zeus takes on the

form of an animal not considered predatory to approach Leda. In her poetic re-appropriation of the tale, H.D. employs this circumstance to emphasise the gentleness of the swan's deflowering of the "day lily," his "kingly kiss," the "soft fluttering" of his "red […] wings" and the "warm quivering" of his "red […] breast" (line 29, 31-2, 33-4). Neimneh, Sawwa and Obeidat argue that H.D.'s representation of Leda "paints an attractive picture" of the encounter (33). Critical of this erasure of the violent undertones prevalent in classical seductions, they apply language reminiscent of the metaphor of the hunt to describe Leda's tale, including Jenny March's reading that casts Zeus as a deity who "trick[s] his unwitting *quarry*" by means of disguise (in Neimneh, Sawwa and Obeidat 33, my emphasis).

As the poetic renditions of H.D. and the male modernists differ significantly in their readings of Leda's encounter with Zeus, the contemporary poems that portray the tale describe the nature of the union diversely. However, there is a common element of self-reflexive narration in these poems, with the female first-person speakers consistently critiquing the sexual exploitation Leda is subjected to.[21] Lucille Clifton, in her 1993 poems "Leda 1," "Leda 2" and "Leda 3," for instance, foregrounds the perspective of a female figure victimised by a male deity who "curs[es]" her with remarkable offspring ("Leda 1" line 8). She conveys this through overt references to sexual violence, the "slavering lips" of Leda's father and the "fucking god fucking [her]," which she combines with

[21] Whereas many contemporary poetic re-appropriations of Leda, such as Mona Van Duyn's "Leda" (1971), Nina Kossman's "Leda" (1996) and Barbara Bentley's "Living Next to Leda" (1996) portray her union with Zeus as violent and violating, only the poems of Clifton, Duffy, Brown and Kumin will be discussed in this thesis.

imagery associated with the annunciation, such as the "stable" as well as the "star" and wise men "coming from the east" ("Leda 1" line 9, 12; "Leda 2" line 1-2, 6). Duffy in her poem "Leda," on the other hand, portrays her speaker's union with the god as consensual, using language associated with matrimony, the "swans" that swim "in their pairs […] partnered for life" and the speaker "kne[eling] like a bride" to emphasise the fleeting nature of the swan's visitation (line 3-4, 6). As Zeus in his swan form rises from the water like an "angel," the imagery, as in Clifton's accounts, evokes the idea of the annunciation, and similarly, it is portrayed as exploitative, the speaker left with nothing but the "names" of the "children" she will bear and her memory of the union, captured in "the song swans sing when they die" (line 7, 15, 16).

Conversely, in the poems of Brown ("Leda, No Swan" 1996) and Kumin ("Pantoum, with Swan" 2000), the well-known images associated with Leda's tale are not religious, but drawn from the classical tradition and paintings. These are employed to critique the emphasis placed on the virile power of male deities like Zeus by unveiling the experience of rape from Leda's perspective. In Brown's poetic retelling, for instance, the trauma inflicted on Leda is made apparent as she describes her experience of the attack, which stands in stark contrast to the paintings that depict her tale aesthetically, giving her a "complaisant smirk," "pretty legs" and "dreamy eyes" (line 1, 5, 10). By recounting the violence of the rape, the "wings that could break your arm […] thrashing" her, the "black bill hissing" menacingly in her face and the "foreign body" that presses down on her "guts," she contrasts its reality with the perceptions of a society that dismisses her experience (line 17, 18, 21-22). Similarly, Kumin's speaker is acutely aware of a

classical tradition that romanticises rape and societal perceptions that criticise victims. In effect, as she takes the "morning-after pill," she invokes the tale of Leda, where rape engendered the narrative of Troy, to describe the way in which she attempts to do away with the harm inflicted on her by terminating her unwanted pregnancy (line 10). However, as authors like Homer, Euripides and Sophocles prevail and are revived in works such as the poetry of Yeats, Kumin's speaker is unable to shed her knowledge of these authors and the way in which the sexual violence they describe mirrors her own experience.

"The Hard Word Rape" in Eleanor Brown's "Leda, No Swan"

Unlike Duffy's poetic account, which portrays a Leda that eagerly invites the sexual union with Zeus, in Brown's poem the speaker is subjected to the god against her will. The title "Leda, No Swan" brings to mind that of a painting. Further, it emphasises the way in which Brown's poetic account, unlike those of male poets like Yeats and Lawrence, foregrounds the perspective of Leda as first-person speaker rather than the virile power of the swan. Faced with the injustice of sexual assault and the blasé societal perceptions of her experience, she grows increasingly angry as her account of her experiences progresses, faced with a society that is indifferent to her suffering. As she responds to representations of her tale that are picturesque and romanticised, she sardonically engages with the society that sees her experience in this manner and insist that it does not merit the "use of the hard word Rape" (line 10). To challenge this misconception, she conveys the trauma of the assault with a first-hand account of the swan's

extraordinary strength, his "wings that could break your arm" and the menacing nature of his "hissing black bill" (line 18, 19). Though her experience of the attack is consistently dismissed by those around her, she appeals to the ability of her addressees to empathise with her situation as she exposes the violence of the onslaught. Ultimately, she asserts her rejection of the so-called honour of divine "favour," her impregnation at the hands of a "divine" rapist, with the forceful statement that she "always wished […] / [she'd] had something to hurt him with" (line 27, 31, 33-4).

The first stanza engages the visual representations of the union, the societal perceptions that romanticise it are mediated through the mocking tone of the speaker. She states that where paintings do not bestow her with "a complaisant smirk," her "mouth might be a slightly startled 'O'" or "a half a 'no' that needn't count as No," thereby emphasising the extent to which the assault is misrepresented (line 1-4). In stating that her addressees "will deduce that he didn't have to work / so very hard to part [her] pretty legs," she cynically anticipates their response by signalling the common perception that she was complicit in her rape (line 5-6). This understanding of the encounter is further emphasised in the aestheticised visual descriptions:

His curving neck, my curving arm, his beak
in almost a caress against my cheek –
[…]
Look how gentle the victim's dreamy eyes
register nothing more than 'vague' surprise;
those limbs suggest no effort at escape (line 6-7, 10-12).

Neimneh, Sawwa and Obeidat refer to such representations in the paintings of "Leonardo da Vinci, Michelangelo, Correggio, Tintoretto, Veronese, Rubens, Boucher and Delacroix" in which "the swan is generally represented as beautiful in paintings and sculptures" to portray the union in a positive light (32, 33). Building on the romanticised representations of her tale, the speaker challenges the claim that the sexual encounter does not require "use of the hard word Rape" by stating, "look how gentle the victim's dreamy eyes/ register nothing more than 'vague' surprise" (line 9-10, 11-12). Apart from emphasising the passive role she plays in this representation, with limp "limbs" that "suggest no effort at escape," the tone of the phrase is steeped in irony, with "vague" written in quotation marks to indicate that it is a reaction far removed from her lived experience (line 12, 13).

In light of this, the speaker transitions from visual representations of her tale and the societal perceptions that accompany them to her own account of her encounter with Zeus in the stanza that follows. She poses questions that grow progressively forceful, engaging her addressees in a manner that will shatter any illusion of her compliance. The brusque, "[e]ver been frightened by an animal?" immediately reveals the state of fear that paralysed her during the attack (line 14). The questions that follow, equally brusque, convey the suddenness of the "senseless impact of brute attack" that left her "sprawling flat on [h]er back" (line 15-16). The final question, "[e]ver been winded *and* hysterical?" conveys her experience of the attack in no uncertain terms, a circumstance far removed from the "half a 'no'" and "dreamy eyes" of the idealised visual representations (line 4, 11, 17).

In the third stanza, the questions progress to statements, the use of second-person register consistent to convey the speaker's appeal to the ability of her addressees to understand her situation. She starts the defence by describing her attacker as menacing, with:

Wings that could break your arm thrashing your chest,
a black bill hissing in your eyes, obscene,
inhuman, spitting noises that can mean
nothing but let-me-get-in; you,
pressed with the weight of a foreign body (line 17-21)

She continues by recounting the attack in vivid detail, conveying the feeling of being overpowered by "the weight of a foreign body on your guts" and "clammy webbed feet scrambling to get a purchase," the "two or three rough jerks" and "jet of alien slime" its devastating climax (line 21-5). To this effect, the use of the words "foreign," "webbed feet" and "alien" convey, firstly, the swan's bodily otherness, and, secondly, the unnaturalness of a forced union (line 21-5). The abruptness of the statement, "[d]on't get raped by a swan" that contrasts jarringly with the detailed description of the assault, conveys something of the violence of this force. Further, it signals a change in the speaker's tone as she transitions from an appeal to empathy and a defence of her situation to anger at being dismissed and misunderstood.

In the closing stanza, she builds on the ending of the previous one with an equally abrupt "[t]hat's my advice" in the same tone to indicate the misery that is her situation (line 26). The repetition of the phrase "they said" signals society's dismissal of her experience which manifest in the thoughtless admonitions and

prescriptions they give in response to her situation (line 29, 31). She is told that her rapist is "divine," that she should "treat" his attentions "as a sign of enviable favour," and most harshly, that she is "a myth now" and should "try to behave like one" (line 29, 30-1). Like the visual romanticisations of her tale, their interpretation of her situation stands in stark contrast to her lived experience. Zin response, she closes with the blunt statement that "what [she'd] always wished […] / was that [she'd] had something to hurt him with" (line 32-3). However, the phrase "if you want to know" has a defeated tone, indicating that she no longer feels heard and evoking her exasperation at society's dismissal of her suffering (line 33). However, the closing line, with the jarring word "hurt," surpasses the helplessness of this sentiment, indicating her defiance, both against her rapist and society's oblivion, a demand to be heard and acknowledged as a victim of violence seeking retribution (line 33).

'Knowledge' and 'Power' in Maxine Kumin's "Pantoum, with Swan"

Kumin's reading of Leda in her poem "Pantoum, with Swan" is conveyed through the perspective of a female first-person speaker confronted with her knowledge of Greek myth after she is date raped. Her experience of sexual violence causes her to identify with the classical Leda figure to such a degree that she conflates her own situation with aspects of the original myth. Accordingly, she describes her experience as a brutal attack that leaves "bits of his down under [her] fingernails," an image that signals the inescapable reality of the assault that transpired (line 1). Like Brown's speaker, the speaker in this poem wishes retrospectively that she

had hurt her attacker, though the violence of the rape leaves her powerless in the moment. Despite the trauma of what she experienced, she repeatedly states that she "should have known better," a sentiment that implies the societal judgement of sexual assault victims that she has internalised (line 6, 9). The fact that she fails to "press charges" indicates that she feels equally powerless in the aftermath of the rape, while also implying the ineffective responses to sexual assault that discourage victims from expressing what happened to them (line 7-9). In taking "the morning-after pill," she attempts to terminate all traces of the violation inflicted on her (line 10). This act is compared to a Leda expelling "[t]he yolk that was meant to hatch as Helen," and, on a symbolic level, implies her rejection of the male narrative of artistic creation that originates in rape (Kumin line 12). In Yeats's poetic retelling of Leda, for instance, her impregnation by Zeus results in the "put[ting] on" of "knowledge with […] power," and from this violation, the legend of Troy is engendered (Yeats line 14). Kumin's rendition builds on this image, as the potential pregnancy is flushed down "the toilet" along with all the narrative possibilities that accompany it (Kumin line 12). However, the "knowledge" of "ancient Greek history" is "forced on [her]" by her attacker, the implication being that she cannot escape the memory of what happened as she continues to teach "Yeats in a classroom," his perpetuation of a classical built on the violation of the female body (line 22-3, 26).

In the opening stanzas, the female first-person speaker describes the sexual assault that she is subjected to on her "first date" by conflating details from her modern setting with aspects of Leda's tale, a narrative she invokes to illustrate her powerlessness in the face of what she experienced and society's reaction to her in

the aftermath (line 4). She describes the date rape in vivid detail, “a gob of his spit behind one ear” and “a nasty welt where the nib of his beak/ bit down as he came” (line 2, 3, 4). Despite the violence she describes, however, she repeats the phrase, “I should have known better,” indicating the critical societal attitudes that she has internalised, the notion that she could have avoided the assault had she been more careful (line 6, 9). By similar reasoning, she states that she should have fought back by “bit[ing] him off on [their] first date,” the implication being that she could have avoided being sexually assaulted if she had fought back instead of succumbing to his overpowering onslaught (line 7). Though she vaguely states that it is “for some reason” that she failed “to press charges,” it is apparent that it is her internalised self-blame that leads her to believe that she does not deserve to seek legal assistance (line 8). Further, it implies a feeling of defeatedness, possibly the realisation that the legitimacy of her testimony will be questioned. For this reason, instead of taking legal action, she makes the best of her situation and “wip[es] off the wet,” taking “the morning-after pill” in an attempt to suppress the reality of the assault (line 9-10). Yet, in light of the trauma she describes, the description of her pregnancy being terminated, “drop[ping] harmlessly into the toilet,” is ironic (line 14). Particularly her use of the word “harmlessly” conveys the protection she hopes to achieve by erasing all traces of the assault (line 14). On a symbolic level, the act of “forestall[ing]” the semi-divine offspring, “Helen” and the narrative possibilities that accompany her in “Troy” and the “wooden horse,” also represents this repression (line 15-16). Ultimately, this attempt is unsuccessful, as the classical material she teaches recreates narratives of sexual violence that reflect her own experience.

In the final stanza, the speaker, despite her attempts to erase it, is unable to rid herself of the memory of her rape. Referring again to the termination of her pregnancy, its traces "flushed harmlessly away down the toilet," she attempts to reassure herself that the matter has been resolved (line 17). Nonetheless, as is implied by the "bits of his down" that she sees "under [her] finger nails," an image that remains as her account draws to a close, the consequences of the violation stay with her (line 1). Although she annuls the pregnancy that the rape resulted in, an image she conflates with the Leda myth to imply that the narrative of Troy is "forestalled" as the seed of Zeus is ejected, she is still plagued by her memory of the assault and her knowledge of classical myth which evokes it (line 16). In stating that "[t]he swan […] stuff[s] Euripides [and] Sophocles" into her "head," she conveys that, as her attacker forced himself on her through sexual assault, the memory of the violation is perpetuated through the classical tales that celebrate the violation of women at the hands of male gods (line 18, 21). She states that the "knowledge" of "ancient Greek history" is "lodged into [her] cortex" while "[b]ird ke[eps] the power" (line 22-4). This implies that she is powerless to do away with the "knowledge" of a "history" she has become a part of, as one woman in a succession of many who will be subjected to men's sexual violations (line 22, 25). As she teaches Yeats's poem "Leda and the Swan," she is met with "bits of down" that "fl[y] from under [her] fingernails" to remind her of the attack she tried to suppress (line 26-8).

'Faithfulness,' 'Flight' and 'Fiction' in Carol Anne Duffy's "Leda"

As established previously, Duffy's poetic re-appropriation of Leda's tale portrays the sexual encounter with Zeus as consensual. Leda, as the female first-person speaker, goes to the "river" in search of what she describes as "faithfulness," the monogamous pairing she observes in the "swans" (line 1-5). She fixates on the one that swims alone, the god Zeus in disguise, and as they have intercourse, she tries to cling to him although he is already in "flight," ready to leave her (line 5, 8-13). As it constructs this narrative, this poem is cautionary, consistently contrasting images of matrimony and fidelity with ideas of fleetingness and solitude, emphasising that the sexual encounter falls far short of the female speaker's yearning for the intimacy of a monogamous relationship. Consequently, the poetic account conveys a dissonance, the idea that the speaker's desire for a lasting relationship is unrealistic, which is starkly conveyed by the phrase "turn all my unborn children to fiction" (line 14). The word "fiction" here is ambiguous, conveying both the idea that Leda's desire for matrimony is a fantasy, a romance plot fit for a story far removed from everyday life, and the more literal meaning concerning the offspring produced of the union, who will be responsible for major narratives in classical myth. As in her poem "Medusa" (1999), Duffy employs the concept of transformation in "Leda" to indicate the way in which infidelity changes her female speaker. In the moment of penetration, the phrase "turn […] to fiction" represents the moment that the speaker's illusion of fidelity is shattered, and she realises that she has been duped into the pattern of classical seduction, a fleeting encounter with a divine lover (line 14). However, despite the fact that she is abandoned by her "webbed, winged lover," Duffy's Leda, like her

Medusa, is no passive victim (line 8). She draws from her experiences to voice her side of the story by candidly expressing her sexual desire, agency not typical of a classical bride, and, similarly uncharacteristic of her context in classical myth, declaring her unmet needs.

Throughout the poem, the speaker employs past tense to indicate a knowingness on her part. As a woman changed by a sexual experience that left her feeling used and abandoned, her account is instructive. She opens by introducing the root of her desire, which she describes as an "obsess[sion]" with "faithfulness" (line 1). The use of the term "obsessed" already indicates that what she craves is unrealistic, the implication being that she is driven by a delusion (line 1). She describes how she approached "the river," where she was met with "swans" that "swam in their pairs" (line 2-4). It is her knowledge that "they partner forever" that drives her to seek out the "lone swan" in the hope that he will meet her need for a monogamous relationship, a companion that will stay with her for life (line 4, 5). However, like the swan, she is introduced to the reader in a line that stands apart from the other stanzas, which implies that her yearning for fidelity will not be fulfilled (line 1). The underlying perception that the relationship she desires is a fantasy is already suggested by the idealised image she sees in the swan pairs forming "a heart in the air as they touc[h]" (line 2-3).

Once she has approached the river bank, the speaker "kne[els] like a bride as bees pray in the clover," a further implication of her quest for "faithfulness" and commitment (line 1, 6). As the swan rises "out of the water" like an "angel," it appears that it is an answer to prayer, a divine visitation reminiscent of the

annunciation (line 7). This Biblical imagery, an encounter with a divine figure that will result in remarkable offspring, indicates her deluded legitimisation of the union, her perception that her wish for fidelity will be granted (line 1, 6). However, this speaker is no virgin, and the divine visitation no answer to prayer. Though her sexual desire is fulfilled, her "webbed, winged lover" uniting with her in "a chaos of passion" that "beat[s] the fair day whiter," she will ultimately be disappointed (line 8, 9).

In the final stanza, her yearning for a monogamous relationship is reiterated in that her "hands" are "frantic to hold" onto her lover (line 10). However, as he swam "apart" from the "swans […] in their pairs" when she saw him, he is in flight as he is impregnating her, slipping from her grasp (line 3, 5). Though "his weird beautiful form" penetrates her in a fleeting union, he is already leaving as she perceives that their "unborn children" have been conceived (line 11, 12, 14). The language used to describe the sexual union and the moment of conception, particularly the phrase "turn all my unborn children to fiction," gives the idea of a process that is supernatural, and for this reason, fleeting and elusive (line 14). Further, it conveys that the conception of offspring, like her yearning for romance and a lasting relationship, may simply be a figment of her imagination. Whereas the moment of sexual union is euphoric, it is also the moment in which her illusion of "faithfulness" is shattered (line 1). The transformation suggested by the word "turn" is both the moment of conception, the possible engendering of remarkable offspring that will be the subject of prominent classical narratives, and the turning point in the speaker's narrative (line 14). The "instant" when she is "pierced by love," she obtains "know[ledge]," not only of conception, the

narrative that their fictitious offspring are a part of, but also of her lover's impending departure (line 15). She is also "pierced" by "the song swans sing when they die," the implication being that Zeus is leaving the form that would enable him to "partner" with her "forever" as he sheds the guise of swan to return to his divine realm (line 4, 16).

In closing, Duffy's Leda is a first-person speaker that actively seeks out the union with Zeus. Though she is more assertive than her classical counterpart in the sense that she openly expresses her sexual desire, she is duped into meeting the needs of her divine lover while she is left feeling used and abandoned. Whereas she is "obsessed by faithfulness" and "frantic to hold him" as they have intercourse, he is already "fly[ing]" from her in the process (line 1, 10, 13). Ultimately, her desire for a monogamous relationship is not met, and she is left with nothing but the children he engendered in her, and even they, being described as "fiction," may be another aspect of her fantasy of monogamy: the white picket fence and the family that accompanies it (line 14).

Conclusion

As established throughout this chapter, the tale of Leda raises the pertinent question of consent, as its different versions describe her sexual encounter with Zeus ambiguously. The poetic re-appropriations unpacked also express this ambivalence, as some describe the encounter as seduction, while others explicitly construe it as rape. Apart from the erasure of violence in the aestheticised

description of H.D., however, all of the poems expose Zeus's actions as exploitative. Drawing from these elements, I close with my own poetic portrayal Leda by drawing from a societal context where sexually predatory behaviour from men is frequent. My autobiographical first-person speaker invokes the classical narrative of erotic pursuit by engaging with the figure Zeus in swan form. With the well-known expression "lightning never strikes the same place twice," she introduces his divine attributes, the lightning bolts that commonly convey his power (line 1). In so doing, she also conveys a cynicism that stems from repeated violations of her personhood, rejecting the perception that the same misfortune does not recur. She contrasts the idealized portrayal of swans in fairy tales and the naiveté that accompanies childhood with the lived experiences of women who can no longer be duped by those platitudes since they "know the white-hot terror hidden beneath" the swan's "feathers," the danger that lurks in the seemingly benign (line 5). In the second stanza, she foregrounds the perspective of Zeus through her own reading critical of his lustful entitlement, "the hungry eyes" that feast on what it finds "beautiful" because it is "justifi[ed]" (line 6-8). Further, she evokes the legend of Troy by likening the swan to the renowned wooden horse that concealed the Greek army within the walls of the city, reiterating the idea of danger hidden in what seems harmless (line 14). Consequently, "the attack," an action one would not expect of a swan, describes Leda's rape as another exploit "justified" by the fact that the god finds her "beautiful" (line 10-11, 15). In this light, the ambiguous reference to "the seeds of knowledge" (line 16) with which the stanza closes serves as allusion to the classical perception that the end of divine rape, the production of remarkable offspring, "justifies the means," as

Lefkowitz suggests (60). Further, the word "knowledge" conveys the loss of innocence, a childlike naiveté that cannot be regained after violation makes the speaker aware of "the hunger of men" (line 16, 21). Finally, she transitions from the tale of Leda to describe her own context, where women are "more cautious" than the classical virgins, wary of settings where they are alone for the violence that may result (line 17). Expressing the "dread" that comes with the "knowledge" of what she terms "the hunger of men," she conveys an awareness that the danger of sexual violation necessitates in women (line 16, 21, 23). The "gaze" of these men, like the "hungry," predatory "eyes" that "study" Leda in the previous stanza, signals the impending danger (line 12-13, 25). With the phrase "the flutter of fear/ that feathers down/ the napes of our necks," then, she registers a parallel between the situation of classical virgins faced with lecherous male deities, and the women in her own context, faced with mortal men of a similar disposition (line 26-28). Ultimately, it is the male "gaze," the moment of locking eyes and realising that she is an object, that signals to the speaker that things have not changed, and "lighting strikes the same" in her day (line 25, 29-30).

CHAPTER 5

Conclusion: Female Subjectivity in the Face of Sexual Violence

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This thesis has explored the metaphor of the hunt which appears in classical myth and has been used as what Blumenberg terms an absolute metaphor to describe heterosexual interactions in literature and in everyday discourse since then (3). My aim has been to draw attention to this metaphor, which casts the male as predator and the female as prey, by tracing its use in classical accounts as the basis for my reading of its transformation in the revisionist mythopoeia of woman poets. I began by establishing the theoretical framework and unpacking terminologies central to the thesis, such as seduction, sexual violence, metaphor and feminist mythopoeia. I also identified and contextualised the female figures from classical myth that would be the focus of my analytical chapters, namely Daphne, Medusa and Leda. Each of these chapters were constructed according to a set pattern, starting with a theoretical reflection on the figure, followed by an explication on her representation in classical myth and a detailed close reading of the poetic re-appropriations of her tale to foreground how woman poets transform her representation in a way that empowers the female subject, and concluding with a reflection on my own poem concerning the figure to add to the theoretical discourse on feminist revisionist mythopoeia.

The chapter on Daphne explicated the metaphor of the hunt in its most basic form, and began to consider questions around coercion in light of the nymph's silence in

the face of the god's garrulousness, a point theorised by Curran (221). The poetic re-appropriations of her tale thus foreground female expression in the narrative of erotic pursuit. Plath ("On the Difficulty of Conjuring Up a Dryad") and H. D. ("Pursuit") include female first-person speakers who reflect on the idea of the hunt in different ways, whereas Sexton ("Where I Live in this Honorable House of the Laurel Tree") and Millay ("Daphne") cast Daphne as the first-person speaker responding to Apollo's advances.

The chapter on Medusa explicated the elements of the erotic pursuit metaphor apparent in her tale, such as her beauty that caught Neptune's attention and led him to rape her in the temple of Minerva, and the tale of her decapitation at the hands of Perseus, which describes the hero approaching her while she sleeps in the manner a predator would stalk its prey. In this light, the theory used explicated the gaze as a key element of the pattern of erotic pursuit, considering the significance of petrification as a process that turns the objectifying male gaze back onto itself, rendering the gazer an object. I also considered the way in which the metaphor of male expression built on what Enterline describes as "repeated violations against the female body" could be re-appropriated to empower the writing woman subject (78). Accordingly, the poems that revise Medusa's tale foreground her experience, portraying her as a powerful female subject as opposed to the silent victim of the classical accounts. Sarton ("The Muse as Medusa") represents her as the embodiment of female expression, a powerful Muse who transforms the process of petrification to a dynamic mode of articulation. Duffy ("Medusa"), on the other hand, casts her as a first-person speaker responding to the infidelity of her husband, and describes her

transformation into a Gorgon as a process that empowers her to mete out vengeance on the man who devalued her. Finally, Clampitt ("Medusa") portrays the Gorgon as a sympathetic figure, raped in the temple of Minerva and vilified for her monstrosity. Ultimately, she revises the concept of Medusa's petrifying powers as a defence mechanism rather than a malevolent act of vengeance.

In the chapter on Leda, I theorised the pertinent question of consent, as the tale of her encounter with Zeus is the most enigmatic of the accounts discussed in this thesis, providing little clarity as to her experience of the god's advances. Building on the metaphor of male expression that stems from "repeated violations against the female body" explicated in the previous chapter (Enterline 78), the theoretical engagement with Leda's tale also considered the relevance of the classical trope of heroic legacy, the passing on of a male genealogy that originates, as Warner notes, from "instances of rape and insemination" (11). The poetic re-appropriations of Leda draw from this theory, doing away with the enigma surrounding her experience of Zeus's advances and critiquing the idealisation of her tale as a perpetuation of a heroic legacy. Brown ("Leda, No Swan") and Kumin ("Pantoum, with Swan") both explicitly portray Leda's encounter with the god as rape, foregrounding the trauma of her experience and society's attitude of victim-blaming in the aftermath. Duffy ("Leda"), on the other hand, portrays Leda as eagerly seeking out a sexual encounter with Zeus, critiquing his exploitation of her desire for a monogamous relationship. As the poetic re-appropriations of Daphne, Medusa and Leda apply the metaphor of the hunt to settings more contemporary than the confines of classical myth, this concluding chapter shows how what Lopez Maistre defines as "the source domain of the hunt" is as

characteristic of heterosexual erotic discourse in the twenty-first century as it was when Hesiod, Euripides and Ovid wrote (90).

As this thesis has demonstrated, the metaphor of the hunt positions the male as predator/hunter and the female as prey, and this, Lopez Maistre argues, brings "power relations" into effect that "manifest asymmetr[ically]" in favour of the former in that the "hunter," as the figure that pursues and subjugates, is "assigned a dominant position over" the one he sets out to capture (98). This linguistic representation of heterosexual interactions, apart from assigning active and passive roles, inevitably raises the question of violence, as it is common knowledge that the prey/quarry is an object for consumption that the hunter/predator sets out to subdue. Although Lopez Maistre states that "[l]iterary texts are a window into the distant past" that "bear witness to the fact that" the idea of the hunt "has been in use for a long period of time," its prevalence in the context of today is not hard to identify (93). In her article "Arthur Hacker's Syrinx (1892): Paint, Classics and the Culture of Rape," Nichols theorises concerning the visual representation of rape, particularly the tale of Pan and Syrinx, and, as her title suggests, sets out to unpack the idea of what she terms "the culture of rape" (109). Although she draws a distinction between "rape culture," which she argues "implies a society where the act of rape is prevalent," and the word "culture" as it describes "literature, cinema, music or the visual arts," the relationship between the two is clear (108). In fact, as "culture" refers to "human social behaviour," in this case, a social context that normalises sexual violence, the creation of "culture" in the sense of the arts and media will draw from it, "represent[ing] rape" as a continuation of that cycle (Nichols 108). Du

Toit also theorises concerning "rape-prone society," particularly the way that it erases female subjectivity (66). She states that, although all women in patriarchal societies are not subjected to the same level of violation, the "logic" that strips them of their personhood is "already pervasively at work in […] society" (66). For this reason, "[r]ape" in these "rape-prone and patriarchal contexts" is "not an abnormal or anomalous occurrence" but "an extreme expression" of the "logic" that strips them of their subjectivity (Du Toit 66). In a similar light, Brownmiller (1975) argues that "[t]he popularity of quite ordinary books, movies and songs that depict violence to women and glorify the man who perpetuates the violence is so entrenched in our culture that an entire book could be devoted to the subject" (293). Amongst others, she cites Mick Jagger and the Rolling Stones' song about the Boston Strangler, titled "Midnight Rambler" to give the idea of a predator on the prowl, and Alfred Hitchcock's film *Frenzy*, which includes a sensationalised rape scene, as examples of the "glamorisation[…] of rape" in popular culture (295, 302).

The subject of rape culture, relevant to this thesis as a whole in its focus on the language that normalises violence against women, is particularly relevant to the situation of South Africa, from which Du Toit draws her examples in theorising "rape-prone […] contexts" (66). From a similar point of departure, Gqola states:

> [t]he discourses of gender in the South African public sphere are very conservative in the main: they speak of 'women's empowerment' in ways that are *not* transformative, and as a consequence, they exist very comfortably alongside overwhelming evidence that South African women

> are *not* empowered: the rape and other gender based violence statistics, the rampant sexual harassment at work and public spaces, the siege on Black lesbians and raging homophobia, the very public and relentless circulation of misogynist imagery, metaphors and language ("Cult of Femininity" 115, emphasis in original).

Despite legislation that appears to empower women, we live in a society where women are not safe and, as a result, do not have freedom of movement. In the face of repeated instances of gender-based violence, the murder of Karabo Mokoena by her ex-boyfriend Xandile Mantsoe in 2017 reignited the notorious 'menaretrash' twitter hashtag, reminiscent of the earlier 'metoo' hashtag that originated in the United States, which women worldwide employed to share experiences of violence at the hands of men. The epidemic of women's exploitation and victimisation at the hands of men is aptly expressed by Gqola's assertion that "South African women, who, on paper are so empowered and have won so many freedoms, are living with the constant fear of violence when [they] cross the street, at work, everywhere" (*Rape* 15). The pervasiveness of this violence renders it "invisible" in that it is "see[n] and hear[d] over and over again" till it fades into the background, an "expect[ed]" reality (Gqola *Rape* 79). Gquola describes this circumstance as the "female fear factory," the mass production of women's vulnerability to "rape and other bodily wounding," which "remind[s] women that they are not safe and that their bodies are not entirely theirs" (*Rape* 78, 79). Further, it serves as an "exercise in power that communicates that the man creating the fear has power over the woman who is the target of his attention" and "teaches women who witness it about their

vulnerability either through reminding them of their own previous fear or showing them that it could happen to them next (Gqola *Rape* 79).

The normalisation of violence against women through societal attitudes and the prevalence of representations of sexual coercion and rape in popular culture are, as Brownmiller argues, ingrained in the consciousness of women, who are acutely aware of their vulnerability to these acts (295). However, the stripping away of female subjectivity in less noticeably violent ways, such as their subjection to men in relationships and marriage, often goes unnoticed. Theorising about customs of courtship in the classical world, Reeder observed the cultural acceptance of language that implied force, such as the symbolism of "abduction and subjugation" implemented in the marriage ritual of the "bridegroom's grasp of the bride's wrist" (300). Despite its violent undertones, this ritual was considered "a positive image" and "accepted by both male and female" parties (300). However, regardless of the level of coercion involved, Chimanda Ngozi Adichie argues that "[t]he language of marriage is often a language of ownership, not a language of partnership" (30). The custom of the father giving his daughter away to the bridegroom, for instance, implies that she is leaving his headship to submit to the authority of another man: her husband. In the language used to describe courtship, imagery associated with the hunt is common, as is apparent in the concept that a man seeking a relationship with a woman 'pursues' her. Lopez Maistre makes the point that "[t]he physical and cultural experience of the hunt provides a source domain where love and sexual desire are represented as a hunt" and that "aspects of love relations such as romantic attraction […], courtship, flirting, seduction, dating, and sexual desire are conceptualised in terms of the

discovering, chasing and catching which one subject performs on another represented as prey" (93). This language of ownership, Irigaray observes, can already be identified in the sentence "I love you," where the "I" is subject, and the "you" object (*I Love to You* 110). Instead, she formulates the language of relationship as "*I love to you*," with the "to" serving as "the site of non-reduction of the person to the object" (*I Love to You* 109, 110, emphasis in original). She rejects the metaphor of the hunt, the relationship of predator and "prey," stating, that "making you my property, my possession, my *mine* does not accomplish alliance," but rather "sacrifices one subjectivity to another" (*I Love to You* 111, emphasis in original). The relationship expressed in the sentence, "*I love to you*," then, is a relationship between equals, the erasure of the hierarchy common in heterosexual romance.

This thesis unpacked the metaphor of the hunt as it appears in classical myth, and the way that it is transformed in the poetry of women. Building on this, this concluding chapter considered the prevalence of the language of the hunt in the twenty-first century, theorising examples such as rape culture and the dynamics of ownership in heterosexual relationships. In their re-appropriations of Daphne, Medusa and Leda, the women poets discussed in this thesis draw attention to the stripping away of female agency in classical myth, foregrounding subjects from their own contemporary contexts, such as the repression of female sexuality, sexual coercion, rape, victim blaming and female expression, amongst others. Through revisionist mythopoeia, they retell the stories of the figures in a new language that does away with the ambiguities of the male-centred classical

tradition, which silences women and normalises violence against them, and address the injustices faced by women in their own societies. Excavating the female figures from classical myth and giving them a voice, they draw attention to their objectification by male desire, and grant them subjectivity in their own right. No longer the "prey," the "possession" of the male subject, their "subjectivity," as Irigaray would argue, is no longer "sacrifice[d] to another," dominated by another (*I Love to You* 111). Like Arachne, the proto-feminist artist who depicted the rapes of the Olympian gods in her tapestry, thereby exposing and criticising their exploitation of mortal women, the poets discussed in this thesis turn to the stories of Daphne, Medusa and Leda as cautionary figures and muses to expose and challenge the culture of violence against women, normalised in every-day discourse and enacted daily on their bodies and psyches.

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APPENDIX: OWN POEMS

This appendix includes my own poems, which I discuss in the concluding section of each analytical chapter (2 through 4).

Chapter 2: Daphne

"Daphne"

A tree brushed against me last night,
tracing those marks
you left on my body
like severed limbs,
the ghost of feeling that stays
even after the source is cut.

I felt a human touch
in that tree,
branches fingering,
gently fingering as if to say,
"I've known him, sister,
he's chased me too."

Chapter 3: Medusa

"Medusa"

Sprawled as they left you,
hair coiled,
and the worms like serpents
scale the colossus
of your cold, bruised face,
pale like cracked marble.

We look on
through reporters' cameras,
the clinical captions of newspaper columns,
expertly holding horror at arm's length.
You're "one in three,"
a woman seen and snatched
without asking.

Your gaze,
hardened now
to that moment
life left you
still holds power,
as the legend goes,
to turn hearts to stone.

Chapter 4: Leda

"Leda"

They say lightning never strikes
the same place twice,
tell children lies about swans,
those magical creatures
that transform with the
simple swish of a wand.
But we've known
the white-hot terror
hidden beneath those feathers.

She was beautiful,
so speaks the legend,
and that justified the hungry eyes
that studied her,
a Trojan horse in fowl form,
and the attack that planted in her
the seeds of knowledge.

More cautious than she,
we walk a world where
swans retain
their creature-form

while the hunger of men
breeds the encounters
we dread.
And we know from
their gaze,
the flutter of fear
that feathers down
the napes of our necks,
that lightning strikes
the same for us.